THE RELIGIONS OF SOUTH VIETNAM
IN FAITH AND FACT

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
BUREAU OF NAVAL PERSONNEL

NAVPERS 15991 1967
This volume was prepared by the Chaplain Corps Planning Group, Chaplains Division, Bureau of Naval Personnel. It is one of a series of materials supportive of the Personal Response Project, a systematic effort in inter-cultural attitude improvement which in Southeast Asia involves an understanding of the indigenous religions and cultural value systems.
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The naval establishment has traditionally emphasized the requirement for all personnel serving abroad to honor and respect the customs, institutions, ceremonies and attitudes of the inhabitants of foreign countries. Navy Regulations, Articles 0623 and 1215, impose this requirement on all levels of command.

Counterinsurgency operations add new dimensions to this requirement. Operation Silver Lance, a Marine training exercise which took place on the U.S. west coast in March 1965, included simulation of the problems which arise when military personnel are not informed about the religious and value systems of a host country. This exercise demonstrated that such a lack of information can create alienation of local peoples, a decrease in security, and a potential increase in casualties. The experience gained was subsequently determined to be applicable to the growing conflict in Vietnam.

At the request of the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, the Southeast Asia Religious Project was established in the summer of 1965. A naval chaplain was assigned to make an in-country study of the beliefs, customs, religious practices and value systems of Vietnam. Information available in existing written sources was deemed insufficient.

The data collected has been organized and evaluated and is being published in various forms in order that the information can be made available to all who serve in, or make plans for, Vietnam and adjacent waters and areas. Two basic lectures, published separately with supporting materials, should be included in all Southeast Asia orientation programs -- pre-embarkation or in-country. The attached basic reference book, THE RELIGIONS OF SOUTH VIETNAM IN FAITH AND FACT, provides essential information for instructors and all other levels of leadership.

Two other publications are in preparation: THE PEOPLES OF THE TRIBES OF SOUTH VIETNAM and JUST AS DIFFERENT ON THE INSIDE. These materials will also be made available to Army and Air Force, as well as to Marine and Navy, personnel.
The materials, efforts and objectives to understand the people of Vietnam are identified as the PERSONAL RESPONSE PROJECT. The theory behind the Project is quite simple. Our personnel share common and distinctive points of view, values and habits of communication and relationship which are different from those of other nations, certainly different from the Vietnamese. When these differences are unrecognized, peoples of the host country are alienated, often by unintentional violation of their precious values and their revered religion.

Sympathy for the Vietnamese people, important as it is, is not enough. Sometimes sympathy is only an expression of a kind of paternalistic superiority.

Imitation of the Vietnamese practices and standards is not required. Too often it is thought that to understand a people and to be understood by them, we must "ape" them. But this kind of imitation is detected as a cheap form of paternalism.

The key is identification which involves three types of relationships. First, we must know the people. We must understand, insofar as possible, the what, how and why of Vietnamese behavior. In the second place, we must also be willing to be known by the Vietnamese. To those with whom we associate, we must expose, not arrogantly display, some of our own fundamental concepts with simple explanations, so that not only can we adjust to the Vietnamese but so they can adjust to us. Thirdly, we must behave understandably. We must be willing to modify our usual methods and approaches so that they will not give false impressions of our desires and intentions.

We identify with the Vietnamese when we help them meet fundamental needs, such as food, medicine, shelter and clothing. And this is much appreciated by the Vietnamese. But it is far less significant than an identification which involves symbolic behavior. It is only when we get into the realm of ideas, values, emotional responses, and aesthetic judgments that we are really participating in the lives of people. The Vietnamese do not regard themselves as merely biological
machines, for each individual is a distinct, self-conscious entity. If he is to be profoundly influenced, it must be on the level of behavior which is far more personal and less material.

As the individual American meets the individual Asian, the goal of the PERSONAL RESPONSE PROJECT is to assure that the American, overtly, takes the initiative to support, respect and value the basic worth and dignity of the Asian as a person while the American maintains his own values, proper role and identity. This approach offers the best possibility of winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people to the desire for and defense of their own self-determination as a nation.

JAMES W. KELLY
Rear Admiral, CHC, USN
Chief of Chaplains
INTRODUCTION

Man's religious beliefs shape and control his cultural patterns and his educational, political, and economic institutions in both their theory and practice. From the earliest times for which there is reasonable historical insight, there is cumulative evidence that man's reasoning ability has consistently directed him to recognize the presence of a power, or powers, greater than himself. As man's mental capacities have increased, his awareness and understanding of the power have grown and been refined. Man has ordered his notions about this power into schemes of belief and life. Basically, religion is that ordering of man's life by a complex of notions about life which are so deeply held that all he does is governed by them.

A society of peoples cannot adequately be understood, appreciated or influenced without awareness of just how these various religious beliefs and practices are involved in daily life. This is true whether it be of Americans or Vietnamese. Since the two peoples are of differing geographic locations and cultures, it is imperative that we Americans seek to understand our allies as we struggle against a common foe. As an American and a Vietnamese understand each other's value systems, taboos, and the other factors affecting daily life, there can develop a rapport or "cultural empathy" on a number of levels which can help promote better relationships between them.

The ethnic Vietnamese by long tradition have philosophies and religious beliefs which declare man to be a part of nature. Man is subject to, and therefore subordinate to, nature so that harmony can be achieved only as man conforms to the natural world about him. By wrong thought or deed, man can disrupt nature, while by right deeds and thoughts he may create prosperity. An awareness of how these and similar concepts affect behavior and thought allows the American serviceman to be more understanding and more effective in his tour of duty in Vietnam.

The two historic civilizations, India and China, separated by Vietnam as a land bridge, gave their religions to the ethnic Vietnamese. While the Indians gave Hinduism and Buddhism, the Chinese reinterpreted and adapted Buddhism as they passed it along to Vietnam. Taoism and Confucianism were also planted in Vietnam earlier as a part of the Chinese conquest about a hundred years before Christ. These religions were added to the basic Animism originally there. Today, Animism remains a major influence particularly in the religions of the tribespeople of the mountains of Vietnam. Additionally, such faiths as Islam, Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and the indigenous Vietnamese religions strongly affect the daily life of the individual adherent. This religiously-influenced culture molds and shapes the life of the Vietnamese much more obviously on the surface than Americans are affected by the concepts of the Judeo-Christian heritage. If Americans are to achieve the goals of understanding and friendship with the Vietnamese, they must have some comprehension of their religions and be acutely aware of the ways in which these religions affect the values and goals of the peoples.

A specific illustration will emphasize the practical consequences of religious beliefs. Among the Vietnamese peasantry there seems to be little sense of urgency with regard to time. What may appear to the Americans as indolence, inertia, or laziness, may be due in large measure to an inbred passivity due to concepts of Karma, as well as to insufficient diet or disease. For while we place a premium on activity and "progress", the Vietnamese have the tradition of admiring the "passionless sage" which grants the older person a status superior to the scientist, the statesman or the warrior. The purpose of the following chapters is to provide similar insights into the operation of religious forces within Vietnam. This background information is to be shared with service personnel as essential knowledge, not only for survival, but for military and personal effectiveness. No attempt has been made to make this material academically complete.

Every religion can be approached from two points of view. One is the view of recognized professionals or authoritative exponents of the faith. The other is the religion of the masses who profess adherence to that faith. Both will go by the same name, but there is often a vast
difference between the two. There is always
something lost in the transmission of the faith
from its chief spokesmen to a larger member­
ship. A Buddhist, for example, may be quite a
good Buddhist in the popular sense of the term.
He may attend the temple quite regularly, making
his offerings, giving rice daily to the passing
clergy, uttering prayers, and performing various
rites and incantations. At the same time he may
have little or no knowledge of the philosophical
framework of Buddhist belief.
In other words, he is more a Buddhist by
habit and outward practice than by conviction.
In many religious systems there is almost no
attempt to explain to the people the meaning of
what they do or see. Therefore a non-adherent
cannot assume that observable practices provide
an adequate understanding of the daily conse­
quences of religious concepts. He must know
something of the actual, rather than the theoreti­
cal, complex of attitudes and beliefs which lie
behind the rites and rituals if they are to be
evaluated realistically. What follows then is a
simplified, capsule view of the religiously in­
fluenced practices of the people - not a system­
ic presentation of the many religions of
Vietnam.
The goal is to have each serviceman know
the Vietnamese people. To know a people is to
understand, insofar as is possible, the whats,
hows and whys of their behavior. The man who
knows what makes the people of the host country
behave as they do is in the best position to con­
trol and direct his own behavior correctly and
constructively.
I. ANIMISM

Centuries of animism, ancestor veneration, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, etc., have deeply etched the cultural influences in Vietnam. Each of these religions has affected the Vietnamese culture so that at the present time behavior patterns and customs subtly, or obviously, reflect these concepts. The Vietnamese do not make the distinctions between secular and sacred as clearly or precisely as do most Westerners. Therefore the total life of the Vietnamese peoples is much more affected by religious concepts than seems to be the pattern in America. The primary or basic religion of Vietnam seems to be that of Animism. Animism is the religious faith of nearly all the tribespeople, or as the French called them, Montagnards. Traces of Animism are found also in most of the other major religious faiths in Vietnam today.

Animism, currently called "People’s Religion" by some, is a belief in spirits. These spirits may be those of deceased persons or inanimate objects such as stones, rivers, mountains, trees, etc. The basic core of Animism is the belief that spirits by appeasement can be used to create good, or pleased so that they will not create harm, danger and trouble. Moreover, each person has a spirit without which sickness and death would soon occur. This spirit continues to exist even after death has claimed its possessor. The death of the person creates a demand for the provision of the needs and desires of the on-going spirit. Unattended or dissatisfied spirits may become angry, bitter, or revengeful. They may seek to re-enter the present life which will create havoc and harm in numerous ways.

Because of the spirit’s ability to continue an independent existence, it must be cared for properly. As spirits are associated with people, Animists perceive them to be greedy, deceptive, unpredictable, and possessing every trait known to man. Normally, the departed spirits of the good do not create too much concern if the proper rites are performed at the appropriate times, especially those rites which will send them happily on their way to the "spirit world."

However, those people who die violently cause great fear as their spirits may be embittered by such a fate and create havoc to individuals, families or communities. Violent deaths include accidents, war, those killed by tigers, women who die in childbirth or die childless, or those whose bodies are not recovered and properly buried or cremated.

Animists seem more anxious to placate angry or evil spirits who pose constant danger than to seek the favor of the happy or good spirits who may help them. In this sense, fear of the evil wins out over honor toward the good. Because of such concepts, animistic rites become methods which utilize fetishes, blood sacrifices, symbolic designs, magic words, taboos, etc. These are techniques which cause the spirits to do the will of the worshipper.

The animist does not view himself as a helpless or passive victim of the invisible world. He views himself as one who by use of the proper religio-magic formulae may achieve his own goals. The various spirits to be placated are from human, animal and inanimate sources. The animist expends much of his thought, effort, energy, and wealth in religious observances designed to channel the powerful forces to his benefit and in accord with his own desires.

To the animist all existence is one and the same thing, and has no permanent divisions or distinctions of animate and inanimate, human or non-human. Everything past and present is contemporary. This requires that all rituals must follow the prescribed pattern to avoid discomfort to the spirits. Living in fear as he does from birth to death, the animist is almost obsessed with religious observances as he seeks to placate one spirit or the other. He seeks to avoid offending any spirit that may cause trouble.

Animism is basically non-ethical and non-moral. The aim of the animist is not to have his character transformed or changed. It is to create the proper atmosphere so that spirits will comply with the will and wish of the animist. Therefore he does not hesitate to utilize any means which will provide him the protection which he desires, since these are merely means...
whereby he may relate to his world in a meaningful manner. This is especially true in the more backward areas where Animism is yet untouched by other religious concepts. The animist in his continuous power struggle with the invisible world struggles for the best advantages so that he may avoid that which seems otherwise certain and dreadful.

The animist has a pantheon of spirits which range from those in man to those in birds, animals, rocks, trees, streams, etc. He is constantly on the lookout for those who demand immediate attention, and the situations which cannot be ignored with impunity. Because this search is aided by religious "personalities", the sorcerer, magician, or shaman, these persons occupy positions of peculiar importance, power and influence. Since these persons have prestige and special powers in the mind of the animist, special care must be taken by Americans in dealings with them, in discussions about them, or in encouraging courses of action not agreeable to them.

Blood sacrifices, either of fowl or animals, may be used for both fertility and ceremonial rites. They are performed at childbirth, weddings, funerals, etc., and may be offered to either good or evil spirits as the occasion demands. Despite the objections of the French previously, and the Vietnamese currently, some of the animistic tribesmen are believed still to practice the sacrifice of human beings for the puberty rites for young men and also as supreme offerings of appeasement to spirits troubling individuals or communities. The identity of these spirits is determined by the sorcerer through appropriate rites. (These are described in some detail in THE PEOPLE OF THE TRIBES OF SOUTH VIETNAM, a companion study soon to be published.)

Blood sacrifices of various kinds may be offered to the spirits for protection, health and prosperity, events relating to birth, marriage, death, drought, warfare, choosing a new field, building a house, planting a crop, harvesting which has been grown in the swidden-patches, etc. It is through such sacrificial rites that the Vietnamese animist seems to find order and meaning in his life, and they provide that which is essential to integration and sanity.

The simple animist places great emphasis on omens which may be in dreams or signs. These are believed to be sent by spirits to warn of future evil or good. If the animist sees the track of a certain animal on his path in the jungles, it is indicative that if the traveler continues his journey, he will surely meet the "evil one" himself. He must therefore return to his home or village and consult the sorcerer to determine when it will be safe to continue his trip, or if his plans must be radically changed. If during a wedding, a dog sneezes, the animists of Vietnam believes this to be a sign that the marriage is not a wise one. Normally the ceremony is halted immediately. If the couple insists on completing their wedding, some terrible fate is believed to await one of them. The tribesman on the way to his fields may notice a bird perched on a nearby bush or tree, and he will carefully look to see the direction in which it flies. If it goes to the left, friendly spirits are warning him of impending danger, making it necessary for him to retrace his way home immediately.

The animist perceives of sickness, disease and death as being spirit-related, so that treatment is given to appease the spirit rather than to directly cure the ailment. Because death claims such a large number of children in Vietnam, especially among the primitive tribesmen, the fear of evil spirits causes parents to give their children "nick-names" while their given names are kept in the strictest of confidence. The use of such nick-names is an attempt to fool the evil spirits so that they will not seize the child and take away its spirit. Sometimes little boys are actually nick-named after female organs as the parents believe this will surely fool the bad spirits. They are sometimes named after the various animals so that when they are called, the lurking evil spirits will not recognize that the children are being addressed and will not harm them. Many of the children have nick-names that when translated sound unsavory to Americans, but when it is recognized as a defense procedure by parents, it can be appreciated. Especially is this true when it is realized that three grown children out of ten births is considered fortunate among some of the Vietnamese peoples.

Sometimes little boys are dressed as girls to fool the spirits who would prefer boys. Their hair is often cut so that the spirit will be fooled. The long hair is believed to hide the place where the child's spirit actually resides and under this cover the evil spirit cannot find it.

The head is believed to be the residence of the "spirit". The older folk and those less acquainted with Americans, may be disturbed if a stranger pats their children on the head since this may be viewed as an attempt to steal the child's spirit. This concept of the residence of the soul or spirit is widespread and it is often found among the other major religions in Vietnam. Those acquainted with this almost natural
reaction of Americans to children may view the matter quite differently from those who have learned about Americans from antagonistic sources. The communists, for example, carefully study ways to use the various religious beliefs as means of preventing success in the joint Vietnamese-American efforts to bring peace to Vietnam.

Quite frequently mirrors are placed by the doorway of a home, or placed within the house so that they reflect anyone entering. This position is carefully chosen in order to cause an evil spirit to become frightened when it sees itself in the mirror and not enter the home.

Because of the belief by many that sickness and death are caused by spirit activities, jokes dealing with these topics are considered shocking, irreverent, and could provoke evil spirits. The Vietnamese may smile at the joke for politeness sake, but esteem for the American spirit to become frightened when it sees itself in the mirror and not enter the home.

Beliefs arising within Animism give rise to the demand that proper disposal of the dead be made to avoid creating a wandering spirit. It is the same religious concept that encourages the mutilation of corpses by the enemy. This has psychological impacts often not fully appreciated by the Americans. It is this same fear that causes afterbirth to be taken some distance into the jungle by the tribespeople and buried quickly lest it attract evil spirits who will then cause the baby's death.

Among some of the tribespeople, it is fear of the spirits which causes them to build their houses in a certain direction with doors on only one side so that the evil spirit who always travels in one direction cannot enter home. It is a similar concept that causes a number of Vietnamese to place the various red papers which represent the god of the threshold or doorway on or near the doorposts to frighten evil spirits. This belief also underlies the custom practiced by many folk who avoid carrying a small child across the threshold. Instead they carefully hand it across the threshold to prevent evil spirits entering the house with the baby and taking its spirit while it is unguarded. This fear of evil spirits accounts for the strings often seen about the wrists and the necks of small children to guard against evil spirits. Fear of spirits also accounts for the wearing of fetishes, charms, etc. Perhaps this is not too much different from the customs of many Americans (who may be superstitious in spite of their religious teachings, while the animists is superstitious because of his religious beliefs).

Within many ethnic Vietnamese homes, forms of Animism are quite evident. If sickness occurs, it is not unusual to have the shaman, the medicine man, etc., come to give treatments. If the illness is that of a small child, the question may revolve about an aunt that died childless, or an ancestor who desires that his bones be given a more desirable location. In such cases the Taoist or Buddhist bonze or even the shaman or sorcerer, etc., is just the one to ascertain the answer. For a small fee, some rice, a bit of tobacco, a chicken, or some betel (areca) nuts, a ritual is performed and the answer discovered. If it is the ancestor's spirit who wants the bones reburied, this can be done. If it is the maiden aunt's spirit which is troubled and creating the problem, the solution may be to make little paper images of children and with a bit of paper money, burn them. This sends them off to the spirit world where the spirit is made happy, and the child is made well.

Sometimes treatment given to the ill is that of acupuncture (hot cups are used to create vacuum burns or needles inserted about the body). This treatment transfers the felt pain of the patient and is used sometimes to draw evil spirits out of the patient's body. Similar medical treatment has also been used in the Western world of Europe and North America and still may be found in other parts of the West.

Among the animistic tribespeople barriers are often erected along the pathways leading to the village in order to keep evil spirits from entering. These are carefully placed in accord with the sorcerer's advice in order to be effective. It is vitally important to keep the evil spirits from the village lest they bring sickness, hunger, harm, danger, or even death to its residents. Sometimes the barricade may simply be a board or bamboo fashioned in place across the path: it may consist of a maze of barriers along part of the path so that several turns must be accomplished to enter the village. The tribesmen believe that human beings can figure out the maze, but that evil spirits do not have the reasoning ability. Sometimes the approach way will feature quite elaborate temptations to draw the spirit aside so he will forget his mission, or it may feature attempts to frighten the spirits instead.

Fear creates various burial customs among the people. It is fear that causes a tribe to bury its dead with exposed feet, or others merely to place the body in a deep grave left open so that the spirit can return to the village. Fear causes some tribes to tend the graves carefully until a set time. Then after a ceremony of buffalo
sacrifice and wine drinking, the grave is completely abandoned. Fear of spirits causes some animists to place their dead relatives parallel to the side of their houses while awaiting burial. A stranger who dies is placed perpendicular to the sides of the houses to prevent his spirit from becoming confused with that of a dead inhabitant.

Within Animism, fear seems to be the dominant theme as it is the constant companion of its adherents. Among the tribespeople who are not Christian, fear determines who one will marry, where his crops will be planted, where and how his house may be constructed, and may determine his source of water, etc. It is the attempt to deal with this overwhelming concern that creates the belief called Animism. Its presence is so strong in Vietnam that few escape its influence entirely. So while the animist may not have a formal creed or doctrine, he cannot be classified as non-religious. Religious beliefs control him much more than most Americans are affected by their faith. Since man is controlled by his thought patterns, his behavior is in accord with his value system. It is imperative that the Navy Marine Team understand the value systems of Animism, if friendship is to be developed, or if lasting assistance is to be shared.

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PERSONAL RESPONSE PROJECT FILES: Chaplain Corps Planning Group, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. 20330 This activity has field notes, transcribed interviews, on-site observations of Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries. These are records of the ways and means by which the religious beliefs of indigenous peoples affect their value systems, taboos, and daily behavior. The gathered materials and information are shared and checked with external authorities on the area as well as with indigenous religious, cultural, political, economic and educational figures of the country or area discussed.

ANIMISM

The "Spirit House" is a common sight in Vietnam

An elaborate spirit house in the garden of a Saigon Buddhist temple

The Sacrifice of a water buffalo to appease troublesome spirits

Grave of a tribesman in the I Corps area
II. VIETNAMESE TAOISM
(Pronounced "Dah-o-ism")

Introduced into Vietnam through Chinese cultural influence and occupation, Taoism is "a way", "a road", "a law of life" which requires that man adjust to nature in order to have happiness. Its influence is one of the more powerful religious forces in Vietnam today.

Lao-Tze, founder of Taoism, lived about 600 B.C. in China and the religion which he founded is just a little bit older than that founded by Buddha of India or Confucius of China. In agreement with early Chinese thought which preceded Lao-Tze, he taught that man needs to have a relaxed and natural life which could be achieved only when in harmony with nature. Such harmony would promote good will toward others, grant personal integrity, encourage sincerity and simplicity. These qualities undergird spontaneity to the degree that man would be in harmony with nature.

Taoism ("Dah-o-ism"), therefore, is the natural mode of behavior: the best way to acquire perfection in relation to the natural world which surrounds man. Submission to the laws of nature is taught since this encourages virtues such as gentleness, peacefulness, serenity and resignation to "unchangeable fates".

Because harmony with nature is deemed essential, Taoism has encouraged nature worship in its popular practice at least. The ritual of Taoism in Vietnam today seems largely to consist of religio-magical features, divining, fortune-telling, worship of the spirits of nature including the earth, and use of the horoscope, etc., to ascertain the will of nature insofar as the individual is concerned.

Many of the more basic beliefs of Taoism have been absorbed into other religions found in Vietnam. They still mold and form cultural patterns affecting almost all ethnic Vietnamese or Chinese living in Vietnam. These Taoist concepts are to be observed in non-western medical practices; in marital arrangements which necessitate consulting horoscopes; consultation with those wise in reading the relationship of the earth's elements, so that the proposed marriage will be happy, prosperous and fruitful; in the choosing of auspicious dates; and in the ceremonies of worship as they pertain to the Spring, the Fall, the ploughing of the ground, the planting of seed, etc.

Like the Chinese peasants prior to Communist domination, many Vietnamese tend to accept all three of the ways - Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism - without worry of conflict. Taoism is for adjustment to the natural world, Confucianism is for the social world, while Buddhism is utilized for harmony with the universe of which man is a part and for preparing for future existences. The adoption of a new religion by the ethnic Vietnamese does not necessarily mean the abandonment of an earlier faith. Rather it is often a process of accommodation to include all concepts to increase the surety for both the present and future existences.

The principle divinities of Taoism are the Jade Emperor, the Holy Mother (Lieu-Hanh), Lao-Tsu and Chu-Vi. The life of man is not granted that he might find pleasure, but pain as he atones for past offenses of previous existences and prepares for future lives in accord with the Cycle of Existence. Because Taoism insists on harmony with and submission to nature, its inherent drive is the repression of a willingness to exploit nature, to take risks or to gamble for distant goals if success is not obvious. To some extent, Taoism seems to discourage the willingness to engage in combat with either nature or man. Like some aspects of Buddhism, it seems to have overtones of pessimism and a negative attitude toward attempts to change drastically the life patterns.

While having only a limited formal organization in Vietnam today, the concepts of Taoism are in evidence in the daily life cycle of ethnic Vietnamese, whether they be dwellers of the cities or peasants tilling the rice-paddies. The cultural mold into which the Vietnamese are born and in which they are reared has been developed through more than two thousand years. While many people do not know just why certain customary acts are performed, the necessity to see that these are fulfilled is a constant pressure that few Vietnamese would be willing to ignore. The American may have little understanding of such influences, but success will be
present in Vietnamese/American relations only as awareness of such factors promote consideration and patience.

Section XI, "Religion in Everyday Life" reveals many observable ways in which Taoism is a current religious practice in Vietnam.

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PERSONAL RESPONSE PROJECT FILES
Confucianism was introduced into Vietnam early during the Chinese rule, and has maintained much of its influence since that time. In 1072, there was a temple dedicated to Confucius and his leading 72 disciples. Located in Hanoi, this temple was called the Temple of Literature. In Saigon, at the Botanical Gardens, there is a temple dedicated to Confucius called the Temple of Souvenirs. This is the site of Confucius' birthday celebration which is solemnly honored each year.

Born in 551 B.C. as one of 11 children, and largely self-educated, Confucius became China’s most noted educator and learned man. The name Confucius is a transliteration of Khong Phu Tu with Khong as the family name and Phu Tu meaning Master. While having no “bible” and no “clergy”, Confucianism became a religion by its very philosophy and promotion of traditional rites. For instance, in discussing life after death, Confucius said “Respect the spirits, but stay away from them”. At the same time, he promoted ancient religious rites such as the worship of heaven, the honoring of the Emperor, the commemoration of great men, etc. Likewise he taught that ancestral rites should be practiced since filial piety is the basic virtue because one should remember the origin of life. He apparently encouraged the building of temples to noted men, and thought seasonal rites should be performed to them as signs of respect and veneration.

Because the aspirations of man are universal, the teachings of Confucius have been widely accepted. He encouraged the three virtues of humanity, intelligence and courage. In the daily life patterns, he set forth the moral obligations of right relationships between ruler and minister, father and son, elder and younger brother, husband and wife, friend and friend. Confucius was perhaps one of the leading humanists of all times with his major concern being the present life.

These concepts formed the basis of his writings and ethical teachings. Sometime after his death a temple was built in his memory at Chufon. Sacrifices were offered in this temple until the fall of the dynasty of Chou. Confucius was a very conservative man with a great respect for law, he was not inclined to change or progress. Basic to his teachings was the establishment of rules and regulations for the functioning of bureaucratic states.

His teachings were social and ethical, and without speculative questions. There was very little obvious supernatural religion in his teachings other than his claim to divine inspiration. In his doctrines, which were pragmatic and practical, there was no personal deity; no god who was responsible for the beginning of all things. He believed that there was no such thing as a First Cause, which might be called God, but that force and matter existed from all eternity. They were eternal in the sense that Christians claim eternity for God; they always existed independent of anything else. There was an encounter between these two with force acting on matter somewhat like the active masculine element on the passive feminine element which produced Heaven and Earth. Mankind also resulted from their union. Therefore man is endowed with an essentially good nature, but to preserve this he has to sharpen his wits and act in the correct manner. His reason must not be clouded by his emotions. Heaven has endowed each person with a conscience that allows him to distinguish good from evil, and the reward of virtue is the tranquility of soul that man forever seeks.

His practice was to accept all the main religious rites. He seems to have rejected the idea that true life exists after death as the Christians believe, or in Nirvana as the Buddhists believe. He advocated the enjoyment of a simple life, especially family life, and harmonious social relations. Even though Confucius did not believe in a personal God, his system had its scriptures, rituals, family religion, and cult of ancestors. Confucius collected, edited, and in some cases, rewrote the classics of the Chou period (1100-481 B.C.).

His books were responsible for the standard of Confucian orthodoxy - these classics were:
1. The Yi Ching (Book of Changes)
2. The Shu Ching (Book of History)
3. The Shi Ching (Book of Odes)
4. The Ch’um Ch’iu (Events in the Province of Lu)
5. The Li Chi (Book of Rites and Ceremonies)

Besides these classics we have:
1. The Analects (Saying of Confucius)
2. The Great Learning
3. The Doctrine of Man (Compiled by a disciple)
4. The Works of Mencius (The great successor and disciple of Confucius)

As a major emphasis in its ethical system, Confucianism regulates relations between people. It is the improper conduct of these relations that causes disorders in the social group and therefore throws man out of harmony with the universe. The cosmic world (Heaven and Earth) are in harmony, and man’s aim in life is to achieve a similar harmony. Vietnamese Confucianism, though without a strong formalized organization, still vitally affects nearly all ethnic Vietnamese. This is part of the cultural environment into which the child is born.

Confucianism gave Vietnam a highly organized hierarchial society. Yet while encouraging the improvement of the individual, it did so in order that he could better function for the community. For the individual was, and is, perceived to have little value beyond the family and society. In this sense Confucianism is anti-individualistic.

Since in Confucianism death does not mean the annihilation of man (as the spirit is thought to survive the body) ancestral worship is the giving of veneration to those to whom life is owed. Confucianists believe upon death the “spirit” wanders in space as an exile. Duty requires that it be brought back to the family altar and be worshipped. Filial reverence is the primary duty of all Confucianists. On all solemn occasions the ancestral spirit is to be invoked and offered liquors, flowers and fruit, which is accompanied with prayers and incense.

Confucianism or Religion of Life, is vividly seen throughout Vietnam in the worship paid to ancestors, as well as in the Festivals of Spring, Autumn, Youth and to the New Year. The formal names of these are Festival of the Arrival of Spring, the Mid-Autumn Festival, the Children’s Festival, and the Festival of TET.

TET is the Festival of Renewal and Rebirth, or Meditation and Hope. With fireworks (in peace time), ringing bells, and beating tom-toms, toys and much food, TET is a high occasion in Vietnam. Many folk visit the pagodas to worship, burn joss-sticks and sandal-wood incense, with flowers, food and liquors being placed also on the family altars. It is the occasion when long life is wished to others, when happiness and hope for the abundance of offspring, such as five girls and seven boys each more handsome than the other, is extended to all.

The other worship occasions involve the worship of the land. Such ceremonies include the Festival of the Beginning of Plowing, and the Rice Festival, the Harvest Festival and the Festival of the First Fruits. Because the Vietnamese feel that the land has always nourished them in spite of drought, war, foods, etc., the farmer never seems to lose faith in the land as he plows, plants, harrows, weeds and irrigates it. To express his thankfulness for such response, the land is given honor in seasonal festivals which expressing hopes and efforts of the past and for the future. Such worship of the land has tended to create in the Vietnamese peasant an almost fanatical attachment to his birthplace which nourished him during life, and becomes his grave after death. It is the combination of worship of the land and ancestor veneration which creates the sight of numberless graves being scattered throughout the farming areas of Vietnam.

Confucianism has exercised a powerful influence in the formation of Vietnamese society, and continues to have great force at the present time. As in China prior to the communist government, the family is the basic unit of society. Thus the four fundamental principles which govern Vietnamese women as a whole constitute filial love, conjugal love, love for the home and mother love (or obedience to father until married, obedience to husband while married, obedience to eldest son when husband is dead). One Vietnamese writer says “A barren women is almost despised and families are large for the mission of Asian women in life is to bring into life as many children as possible” (Tran Van Tung, Vietnam, New York: Frederick A. Praeger; 1958).

The major principles of Confucianism are:

1. The individual is always less important than the family.
   
   Confucius said “While his parents are alive, a son should not dare to consider his wealth his own; nor to hold any of it for his private use.”

2. The living person is merely the connecting link between the dead and yet unborn, so that all proposed actions must consider the welfare of these two classes more important than one’s own fate.
Confucius said “Although your father and mother are dead, if you propose to yourself any good work, only reflect how it will make their names illustrious, and your purpose will be fixed. So if you propose to do what is not good, only consider how it will disgrace the name of your father, and you will desist from your purpose.”

3. Because devotion and veneration of ancestral spirits promote their welfare, marriages are planned by the family to insure sustained veneration. Confucius said “The ceremony of marriage was intended to be a bond of love between families of two different surnames, with a view in its retrospective character to maintaining the services in the ancestral temple; and in its prospective character, to secure the continuance of the family line.”

4. Veneration rites encourage large families.

5. Deep respect is due to elders, aged and seniors without regard to factors other than age. Confucius said “Filial piety and fraternal submission—are they not the root of all benevolent actions?”

6. The cult of ancestor worship or veneration gives the male double roles: head of the household and religious head of household for ancestor veneration. Since this rite normally is conducted only by the male descendants, boys are more desired than girls. Confucius said “Man is the representative of Heaven and is supreme over all things. Woman yields obedience to the institutions of man and helps him to carry out his principles.”

7. Confucianism as a religious force is not apparent among the Montagnards who comprise approximately 5% of the total population.

8. Confucius thought society’s reform must begin at the top. Just as leaders establish the moral climate for society, so do fathers for the family. With filial piety stressed as the highest virtue within a family, reverent obedience of son to father was implicit. Because the veneration of ancestors is an extension of filial piety, it seemed natural to Confucius that this should be endorsed. Undoubtedly popular Confucianism in Vietnam is quite different than the original teachings of the sage, but its effect on the culture and people of Vietnam is undeniable. (See section XI, “Religion in Everyday Life”, for illustrations of Confucian influence)

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PERSONAL RESPONSE PROJECT FILE
The dead are still part of the family so graves are as elaborate as finances allow.

The good man earns the right of burial on his land.

The round dirt grave symbolizes the "circle of life". Such graves dot the countryside of northern South Vietnam.

Burning joss sticks and bowing as acts of veneration in a courtyard for Confucian ancestor worship.
IV. HINDUISM IN VIETNAM

Hinduism, like Buddhism, came from India to Southeast Asia. In contrast to the prevalent Buddhism of Vietnam, however, Hinduism came directly from India to this area without undergoing the transformation created by Chinese influences. While Hinduism is perhaps older than Buddhism, Confucianism or Taoism, it was not a major influence in Southeast Asia until the early Christian Era. While several reasons for the timing of its arrival in Southeast Asia might be given, a major cause seems to have been the cessation of gold supplies from Siberia. Moreover, the Roman Empire merchants and the Indians were unable to solve this shortage so that it was necessary for them to seek their own supply. Since the Indian legends in Sanskrit had long used the terms “suvarnadvipa” “the island of gold” and “suvarnbhumi” “lands of gold” in reference to Southeast Asia, it was quite natural that expansion of trade and commerce would be in this direction by sea routes as well as by land.

As the merchants and tradesmen came to Southeast Asia, many of them married into the leading indigenous families and settled down for a long time in the area. The marriages opened business contacts and promoted rapport between the merchants and their customers. Because the women were subservient to their husbands, Hindu religious beliefs and customs became their religion and that of their children. As the merchant families grew in size and number, the pervasive Hindu settlement developed into a city-state in the first century A.D. The first of these Hindu city-states in Southeast Asia was Funan, with Funan located in what is now Cambodia. In Vietnam itself the first settlement of importance was Ha-tien on the gulf of Siam.

The most noted and important of the Hinduized Southeast Asia civilizations was that of Angkor which was a composite of Hindu Indian and indigenous influences. As such, it was a major force in Southeast Asia for some time, and its influences spread throughout much of the area either directly or through the descendents of this ancient kingdom whose major contribution to this century is the ruins at Angkor. Within Vietnam, the major importance of the foregoing is that the Champa Kingdoms originated from this blending of Indian and Southeast Asian religions, doctrines, ethics, art, literature, institutions, ideas and wisdom. Champa in her might and religious zeal constructed prodigious temples in various areas under her control. Since the Champa Empire occupied the Vietnamese coast line from north of Hue southwards, and was not finally eradicated until less than two hundred years ago, its influence may still be seen in Vietnamese life. While the political might of the Champa Empire was destroyed about 1471, succeeding kingdoms were built on the same concepts until the Vietnamese finally consolidated their control of the whole geographic area of Vietnam.

Currently, the Hindu adherents in Vietnam seem to be the Indian merchant families found in the larger cities and the Cham people who are estimated to be 15 to 45 thousand persons. The Champa museum in Danang reveals that the Champa people were greatly influenced by Hinduism, as are most of the Chams today, even though their Hinduism is mixed with animism, etc. A number of the daily practices of the ethnic Vietnamese families also seem to have a Hindu origin. This is especially true in the rites of healing for the sick, and in such practices as winding string about the house to ward off evil spirits.

Awareness of the subtle presence of Hinduism may provide explanations for some of the customs and religious acts which are seen among the ethnic Vietnamese. When the blending of other religious forces in the lives of the Vietnamese people does not readily explain a prevailing practice, an explanation should be sought in Hinduism. Its influence also helps explain some of the statuary found in the various temples of Vietnam.

The more obvious Hindu concepts in Vietnam are discussed in the Cham Tribal Study in THE PEOPLE OF THE TRIBES OF SOUTH VIETNAM.
GANESHA, the elephant-headed son of Shiva, is a popular god of the Hindus.
V. BUDDHISM IN VIETNAM

A. HISTORY

Buddhism came to Vietnam by the maritime route from India and from China by land. Those who first carried this religion to Vietnam seem to have been refugees from persecution in China and religious pilgrims from India.

The noted Vietnamese scholar, Tran-van Giap ("Le Bouddhisme en Annam, Des Origines au XIII Siecle" Bulletin de L'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient XXXII, 1932 (1933) p. 205), insists that Buddhism could be found in Tonkin (North Vietnam) in the second century A.D. North Vietnam was the cradle of the ethnic Vietnamese culture as it was not until 1802 that the southern area, including the delta, was conquered and consolidated into the approximate area of Vietnam today.

Mou Po (in Chinese; Mau Bac in Vietnamese) is credited with bringing Buddhism to Vietnam. He was a native of Wu-chou, born between 165-170 A.C., who accepted Buddhism in place of his Taoism about 190 A.D. Because Confucianism was opposing Buddhism in China then, he came to Tonkin and propagated Buddhism by winning converts about 194-195 A.D.

Another figure of Vietnamese Buddhist history is Kang Seng-huei (Khang-tang-Hoi) who with his father left India for trading purposes. He was converted to Buddhism in Tonkin and was later ordained as a monk. Before his death in 280 A.D. his fame as a translator of Buddhist sacred writings from Sanskrit into Chinese enabled him to win the King of Wu. Suen Kuian, to Buddhism. A third figure was Marajivaka. also known as Jivaka, who arrived at Lo-yank after coming by ship to Funan and to Tonkin by 294 A.D. (Tran-van Giap, Op. cit., pp. 212-213). Others, like Ksudra, formerly a Brahman of western India, traveled, taught and won converts in North Vietnam so that Tonkin served as an intermediary for religion, trade and diplomatic exchanges between China and India.

Because Tonkin was on the direct sea route between China and India, it became a center for the propagation of Buddhism and the translation of Buddhist sacred scriptures. While Buddhism in Vietnam was started by pilgrims and refugees; diplomatic envoys, merchants, and immigrants promoted and spread it. Their activities resulted in many pagodas and monasteries being evident in Tonkin according to Giap (Op. cit., p. 227). Popular Buddhism with lay-adherents did not establish itself until later (Op. cit., 235). The founding of a dhyana (meditation) school of Buddhism dates from about the close of the sixth century. Dhyana translates as chan in Chinese, zen in Japanese and thien in Vietnamese.

By the seventh century the Chinese governor of Tonkin, Liou Fang, was reporting that "One sees in Giao-Chau (North Vietnam) numerous eminent priests spreading Buddhism among all the people and also pilgrims flocking from all parts of Asia" (Le Thank Khoi, La Viet-Nam, Histoire et Civilization, Paris; 1955, p. 128). The Chinese dynasty of Suei encouraged Buddhism by granting financial aid, requiring stupas (memorial towers often containing sacred relics of noted persons) to be built, while the Tang dynasty continued to show favoritism to Buddhism.

The independence of Vietnam from China in 939 caused a slowdown or even a temporary setback for Buddhism in Vietnam. But with the rise of Dinh Tien-hoang (969-980) the policy of supporting Buddhism was officially practiced. The basic reasons that Vietnamese rulers sought the support of the Buddhist bonzes and aided Buddhism were (a) the pagodas were almost the sole repositories of culture in both writings and personalities. (b) the scholars of Confucianism were exiled from political life as it was felt that their Chinese education might make them of questionable loyalty.

The Vietnamese ruler granted titles to various Buddhist clergy. The ruler also decreed the establishment of a Buddhist hierarchy that closely resembled the levels of civil government. He raised the bonze Ngo Chan-Tuvo to the rank of Imperial Counselor and gave him the title "Khuong-Viet Thai Su" (Great Master and Supporter of the Viets) while titles were bestowed upon other bonzes also (Khoi op. cit., p. 142).

This royal policy of support was continued by the Le dynasty. The ruler, Le Dai Hanh,
used monks as political, social, economic advisors and consultants in military matters. The bonzes were the official representatives of the ruler and of the State on state-occasions both at home and abroad from time to time. When this occurred at Tonkin, formal visits by dignitaries to such pagodas as that of Sach-giang were included on the official agenda. The Ly dynasty (1009-1225) practiced a similar policy and formed the high-water mark of official support for Buddhism until the present time. Khoi (p. 147) states that the Ly dynasty gained their accession to the throne by the support of the Buddhist clergy. Throughout their reign the throne and clergy were closely linked together with at least 95 pagodas being erected by Emperor Ly-Thai-ton (1028-1054). He caused restoration to numerous Buddha statues in other temples. It was in accord with a dream of his, that the One Column Pagoda of Hanoi was constructed standing in a water pond like a blooming lotus. It was Ly-Thanh-ton who first called himself Emperor of Dai-Viet (Greater Viet) in 1069 with his title continuing until 1832 when Gia-Long subdued the Champa Kingdom and united what is currently the two Vietnams.

The later years of Thanh-ton's reign like the rule of Le-Nhan-Ton gave official favor to Confucianism. Mandarins who were scholars highly trained in Confucianism and Chinese classics became government officials. Before this the monks had presented candidates from which the government would choose the officials. Now it became possible to secure government positions without clergy approval (Khoi, op. cit., p. 149). However, in many cases, the monks continued their leading roles. They were active in both the religious and political life of the kingdom as Kho-dau was named in 1088 Master of the Kingdom while retaining the hierarchy established by Dinh-Tien-hoang. They were given tax and military exemptions by passing an examination which gave an official certificate of authorization to their status (Ibid., p. 152). Occasionally they would receive pagodas with attached domains as princely gifts or as alms. The Master of the Kingdom would assist the Emperor in his prayers for the prosperity of the kingdom and serve as a counselor of State secrets. The Buddhist bonzes were much involved in Vietnamese politics during these years.

Royal support included money, power, and gifts of pagodas as the reigning monarchs continued the securing and copying of various Buddhist sacred writings. In 1018, LeThai-Ton sent an official mission to China to secure and copy the texts of the Tripitka (Tam-Tang: the three parts of Sacred Buddhist Scripture) and housed them at Dia-Hung. When the Sung Court in 1034 sent other copies of major canons as gifts, the royal court marked the arrival with a solemn reception (Ibid., p. 152).

Buddhism began its major Vietnamese adulteration about this time as its purer doctrines were mixed with philosophies such as Taoism, etc. Some monks turned to the study of the elixir of immortality while others engaged in the study of Taoist magic. Some bonzes became doctors of fame and some were credited with supernatural powers. By the close of the eleventh century, Buddhism had planted its roots so deeply into Vietnamese culture that it was no longer considered as an imported religion. It had been introduced and utilized as a court-religion; now it had filtered down to the villages and hamlets. Here mixed with Confucianism and Taoism, it became an indigenous part of the popular beliefs of the common people. The mixture of spirits and deities into the pantheon of Buddhists and Bodhisattvas created little difficulty because of its apparently flexible format. The various elements appear to have provided a ritual which satisfied the formalistic and spiritual demands of the Vietnamese peasantry generally. Having become deeply ingrained in Vietnamese thought and life, its eradication would be difficult, if not impossible, short of such tactics as the communists employ.

During the Tran Dynasty (1225-1400) two writings, Viet-Dien U-Linh Tap (Collection of the Invisible Powers of the Country of Viet) by Le Te-Xuyen in 1329 and Thien-Uyen Tap-Anh Ngu-Luc (Chronicle of the Eminent Monks of the garden of Dhyana) are important. The latter book contains the biographies of famous monks in Vietnam from the Dynasty of Tang through that of Tran. The first book seems to stress animism and Taoism while the second argued for Buddhism. As the Tran Dynasty continued, native animistic beliefs and Taoism affected the concepts of Buddhism held by the Vietnamese even among the higher echelons of its society.
Magic and sorcery became the accepted practices among some Buddhist bonzes. As the apparent decay of Buddhism and a unifying ritualistic structure increased, the processes of adaption speeded up.

The Tibetan Phags-Pa had introduced Lamaism (Mantrayana) from Tibet into the Chinese court. From there it quickly moved to Vietnam and added to the ever increasing adulteration of Buddhism. The funeral processions and mourning rites of ethnic Vietnamese are a reflection of that Mantrayana (one of the major forms of Buddhism formerly found in Tibet) introduced in by-gone centuries.

Even as the introduction of philosophies continued to almost drown Buddhism in Vietnam, some beholders accused the Songha (Buddhist order of clergy) as being anti-civic, anti-social, as being anti-civic, anti-social, anti-social, anti-social, etc. This was due to the accumulated wealth of the pagodas, monasteries and convents. The indigenous forces of animism and the strength of Taoism so changed Buddhism that by the end of the 14th century, it gave way to Confucianism as the primary religion of the government. Confucianism remained the court religion and practice until the impact of the western world in the late 19th century took effect (Khoi, op. cit., 177). However, Buddhism is such an inherent force in the culture of Vietnam that irrespective of its actual numbers, no comprehensive valid understanding of the people can be gained without awareness of its origin, development or influence.

The Chinese invasion of 1414 also brought many Confucian writings. During their short stay in Vietnam, the invading Chinese ordered the destruction of many pagodas and the confiscation of the Buddhist sacred writings. When the Vietnamese regained their independence fourteen years later in 1428, the Ly dynasty continued in favor of Confucianism with persecution of Buddhism according to Buddhist sources. The Emperor Le Thai-to (1428-1433) in 1429 instituted competitive examinations for all Buddhist and Taoist monks with failure requiring a return to lay life. No new temples of Buddhism could be erected without authorization and all monks were subject to surveillance.

Khoi states that most monks of this time were very poorly educated, and had little understanding of the doctrines of Buddhism now so greatly affected by Taoist, Tantric and animist elements (Ibid., p. 219). It is recorded that from time to time the Taoist or Buddhist monks would lead peasant uprisings against the government. "Faced with official Confucianism, guardian of the established order, doctrine of the feudalities and mandarins, these two religions Buddhism and Taoism in their most popular context served as a vehicle for social discontent" (Jean Chesneaux, Contribution a l' Histoire de la Nation Vietnamienne, p. 35).

Chesneaux says that in 1442, the monk Tha Loi tried to become King by self-proclamation, even as earlier in 1391 a band of peasants under the leadership of the monk Su-On had attacked the capital city Hanoi (Ibid., p. 33). In 1516 at Hanoi in Hai-Duong province, the monk Tran Cao tried to pass himself off as a reincarnation of Buddha while leading a revolt against the Emperor. In doing so he required his soldiers to have shaven heads and wear black clothing (Ibid., p. 42). Even though such events did not basically cause any extended changes, they are indicative of the political and military involvement of Buddhist leaders. Understanding these factors aid to evaluate the current religious-political-military struggles in Vietnam.

During the civil war of the sixteenth century both the Nguyen rulers of the south and the Trinh dynasty of the north sought to claim the loyalty of their people by identifying themselves with Buddhism. This was used as a political strategy. Buddhism began a limited recovery. (Mai-tho-Truyen, "Le Bouddhisme au Vietnam", Presence du Bouddhisme, p. 80). The rigidity of Confucianism tended to reduce scholastic training to rhetorical exercises and philosophical speculation so that new schools of Buddhism coming from China were almost eagerly accepted by the courts (Khoi, op. cit., p. 279). Such seems evident as Trinh Tac in 1662 issued a decree in Tonkin which banned all books on Taoism, Buddhism, and the "false doctrine" (Christianity). He urged all to remember and adhere to their traditional values, but new Buddhist schools were established anyway (Ibid., pp. 279-280). So effective were some of these schools that the Empress Dieu-Vien (Trinh-thi Ngoc-Hanh) wife of Le Than-ton (1619-1643) and her daughter renounced palace life and became nuns after becoming converts to Buddhism.

The Trinh dynasty (fervent Buddhists) restored many Buddhist temples and built numerous temples. They welcomed Chinese Buddhist monks fleeing the Manchu conquest. Among these was Ta Nguyen Thieu (d. 1728) a noted builder of temples and monasteries, including the monastery at Vinh-An (later called Quoc-An, meaning Grace of the Kingdom) at Phu-xuan (Hue) with his temples at Hue rivaling those of That-Long in the north (Ibid., p. 281). Even with the protection and support of the rulers, Buddhism was weak and Confucianism...
was not aggressive. This period may have given rise to the fusion of the three religions of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, as the various scholars changed from religion to religion (Khcl, op. cit., p. 282). The syncretism of this time formulated the religion of many contemporary Vietnamese by the absorption and modification of many beliefs and rites into a common folk-religion (Ibid.).

The Nguyen family, while being strongly Confucianist, attempted to achieve a sense of national unity, and was hostile to the popular beliefs of Taoism and Buddhism (Chesneaux, op. cit., p. 88). The monks were reduced to temple guardians and masters of ceremony. The spirit of Buddhism seemed lost by the discipline of the monastery being relaxed While scholars changed from religion to religion (KhOi, op. cit., p. 88), The monks were reduced to temple guardians and masters of ceremony. The spirit of Buddhism seemed lost by the discipline of the monastery being relaxed while scholars changed from religion to religion (KhOi, op. cit., p. 88). While Gia-Long, a strong adherent and advocate of Confucianism and ancestral cult (1902-1919), reigned, he disapproved of Buddhism and forbade any favors to its monks. His code expresses this in article 143 as it prescribed "forty blows of the cane to officials who permit their wives or daughters to go to the temple of Buddha, Dao or of geni...", while "eighty blows of the truong to those who without permission shave their heads or wear the Taoist headdress" is a part of article 75 (Chesneaux, op. cit., p. 88).

Buddhism increased its syncretism due to governmental pressures and multiple controls so that it came to be a religion thoroughly mixed with mysticism, tantrism, animism and polytheism (Truyen, op. cit., p. 807). However, it played an active role in the religious nationalism of southern Vietnam during the period of 1860 to 1880. Later in 1885 it provided a structural unity for the anti-French nationalist movement and part in the 1885 insurrection.

In 1931 an association of Buddhist Studies was established in Saigon; a year later in Hue and in 1934, in Hanoi. Immediately a number of translations and publications were prepared, but the Second World War halted this Buddhist revival. In 1946 the monks of Hanoi reorganized their order of Buddhist clergy (Sangha) and their lay association as they established an orphanage, a college, a printing press, and took steps to care for the war victims. This was followed in 1930 by a new Association of Buddhist Studies being organized in Saigon. In Hue a year later (1951) a Buddhist Congress met and voted to merge the three regional associations, codify the rituals, develop adult religious education, organize a Buddhist youth group, and join the World Buddhist Organization. Again this was disrupted as the terms of the 1954 Treaty divided the country. The General Buddhist Association of Vietnam was formed in 1956, composed of three monk communities and three lay associations with the former being the Association of Buddhist Studies in South Vietnam, the Buddhist Association of Central Vietnam, and the Vietnamese Buddhist Association. As this was organized in Saigon, the Vietnamese United Buddhist Association was formed at the Fourth Buddhist Congress in 1958 (Hanoi) with the stated aim of uniting all branches and sects of Buddhism and more effectively continuing the plans established in the 1930’s. Since this organization must have the permission of Hanoi to exist and operate, and since the communists are opposed to religion, there is some question to just how much freedom a religious organization may have there.

While there are at least sixteen members of the United Buddhist Association only five are significant enough to be included here. They are:

1. **Ethnic Cambodian Theravada**: primarily found in the ten delta provinces with 400,000 to 500,000 people. Their Buddhist customs are very similar to those of Cambodia and Thailand. With the histories of Wats (temples and temple grounds) totaling less than 75 years, it is believed that these Theravadin have been in Vietnam less than a hundred years. This group may have up to 20,000 monks, but no nuns although some women seem to aspire to this office. Being generally non-political, it has been largely ignored by the Vietnamese government until now.

2. **Ethnic Vietnamese Theravada**: A very small group with perhaps 30 monks with discipline and learning processes not too well organized yet. Its adherents, while few in number, are found in a half-dozen or more provinces as well as in Saigon and Danang.

3. **Ethnic Chinese Mahayana**: This group has nine temples in the Saigon/Cholon area with some five associations based in the provinces where in the larger cities the Chinese are found as rice-merchants. Like the Chinese in general throughout much of the Asian scene, they do not take a noticeably active part in political activity, but are Members of the Chinese Buddhist Association and the World Fellowship of Buddhists.

4. **Vietnamese Mahayana**: This is the major group of Buddhists found in Vietnam. They are almost everywhere except in the tribal areas where few wish to linger. It has some 12,000
monks and about 4,000 pagodas or wats. Its leaders are the vocal spokesmen of Buddhism in Vietnam today with some apparently being more radical than others. As a religious faith, its doctrines are much the same as that of the Japanese Mahayana Buddhism, but its practice is modified by the same cultural patterns and influences which affect other Vietnamese.

(5) Hoa Hao (Pronounced “Wah How”): This reform Buddhist group has doctrines which stress simplicity of basic Buddhist precepts, and was founded by Huynh Phu So in 1939. As “puritan” Buddhism, physical symbols, hierarchy and ritual are not stressed so that elaborate pagodas, expensive bonze clergy and large offerings are not needed. The Hoa Hao are accepted as Buddhists by other Buddhist sects even though the Cao Dai are not so accredited. Since both the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai differ so radically from the various Buddhist organizations, studies on each of these two have been included as separate sections.

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B. MAJOR TEACHINGS OF VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM

Buddhism, as founded by Buddha and practiced by Buddhists today, is not monolithic. Established about 500 B.C. as a revolt against conditions in India out of which Hinduism also arose, Buddhist philosophy is divided into such major schools of thought as Theravada (Teaching of the Elders), Mahayana (The Larger Vehicle) and Mantrayana (the Tibetan version). These schools are subdivided into approximately a thousand sects.

In Vietnam some sixteen of the Buddhist sects, including both Theravada and Mahayana, have joined together in the United Buddhist Church of Vietnam. Many of these are also strongly represented in the Vien Hoa Dao, The Institute for the Execution of the Dharma, headquartered in Saigon. The differing interpretations of the various sects lead to diversity of thought and behavior at times. When such forces as geography, climate, diet, economics, etc., are added to these religious concepts, there is little wonder that differences are to be noted.

Within Vietnam, Buddhism undoubtedly fills the need of many people which Animism and Confucianism leave void. Philosophically, Buddhism ties man to the universe eternally - past, present and future. In so doing, it provides some comfort to the bereaved, a sense of meaning to existence, and a philosophy (thought pattern) of adjustment to those things which the Vietnamese Buddhist adherent does not believe can be changed.

The major teachings of Buddhism are found in the Benares Sermon of Buddha. This sermon stressed a “Middle Way” between the extremes of licentiousness and asceticism. That this “Middle Way” might be realized by humanity, Buddha proclaimed what is now known as the Four Noble Truths which simply stated are: (1) Existence (life) is a succession of suffering or, to exist is to suffer; (2) Suffering is created or caused by desires or cravings: the ignorance of true reality allows ambition, anger, illusion, etc., to sustain an endless cycle of existence; (3) The extinction of suffering can be achieved
only by the elimination of desire: 108 desires of humanity have been classified and are symbolized by the Buddhist prayer beads: (4) The elimination of desire or cravings can be achieved only through the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddhist adherent strives to perfect himself in this Path which is composed of: (1) right views; (2) right resolve; (3) right speech; (4) right action; (5) right living; (6) right effort; (7) right mindedness, and (8) right concentration.

The Five Commandments or Prohibitions of Buddha expressed in the negative are: (1) Do not kill; (2) Do not steal; (3) Do not be unchaste; (4) Do not lie, and (5) Do not drink alcohol. The positive approach to these commandments are: Preserve life (all life); give alms to the poor and respect their property; be chaste (which in popular Buddhism seems to have different connotations than the ideals of western morality, the term appears to imply discretion rather than restraint in conduct); speak the truth, and avoid those drinks or food harmful to oneself or to others.

The Twelve Principles of Buddhism are as follows:

1) Law of Flux. The first (act of existence) is the law of change or non-permanence. This law declares the world (universe) and everything in it to be impermanent, changing and in constant flux. All things (living and non-living) pass through the same cycle of existence - birth, growth, decay and death. Life is the only continuous force seeking expression in changing or new forms. Someone expressing his concept in form observed, "Life is a bridge; therefore build no house on it.

In this concept, life is a continuous flow and anyone clinging to any particular form, regardless of its splendor, will suffer by resisting the flow. The Buddhist is therefore to struggle to escape this state of constant impermanence by seeking Nirvana. Nirvana is that permanent state which is neither peace (tranquility) that is both eternal and absolute.

2) Discontinuity of the Soul. The law of change applies equally to the soul. Only that ultimate "Reality", that namelessness which exists in Nirvana is beyond change. All forms of life, including man, are merely manifestations of this Reality. The classic illustration of the flow of life within man is that man no more owns that life within him than the electric light bulb owns the current which gives it light.

3) Karma. The universe is merely the expression of law. All effects have causes, so that man's character is the sum total of his previous thoughts and actions. Karma, which means action-reaction, governs all existence and is the reason for man's suffering. Vicious cycles of existence and rebirth result from the actions of this life. The religious path of the Buddha is a path of liberation from the law of Karma. This path is the Eightfold Path.

This doctrine makes the distinction between reincarnation and transmigration of the soul. The latter is declared within Hinduism and refers to the continuing existence of the individual soul incarnated in either higher or lower forms of life. Reincarnation of the life force is understood by learned Buddhists as the teaching of the Buddha. However, within popular Buddhism, many adherents tend to think of themselves as personal candidates for reincarnation and Nirvana. To them, the earning of "Merit" through good works, promises to improve one's status in future existences. Within popular Buddhism, this hope of a personal reincarnation seems to have more validity than the hope of Nirvana. In this way he can realize the rewards and benefits of his personal labors and sacrifices in a more tangible fashion.
The understanding of all life as a unity is believed to create compassion, or a sense of identification with life in all other forms. Compassion encourages eternal harmony so that the breaking of this harmony creates suffering and delays personal enlightenment. Since one does not possess a permanent self, little reason exists for seeking great wealth or property, especially since possessions tend to prolong the cycle of existence because material things encourage desires or cravings.

(5) Existence. Existence is suffering. In ignorance, man thinks he can successfully struggle for and achieve his own interests. This wrongly-directed selfish energy creates suffering. Man must learn that desires or selfish cravings are wrong and must be reduced and finally eliminated.

(6) Salvation. Self-salvation is the immediate task of every man. Increased understanding of the Dharma (teaching) can be gained as the Eightfold Path is followed. By facing existence as it is, and learning by direct and personal experience, gradual release from the endless cycle of existence is acquired.

(7) Eightfold Path. This Path is composed of eight successive steps. These are: (1) Right or perfect views which presuppose preliminary understandings; (2) Right aims or motives; (3) Right purpose; (4) Right speech; (5) Right acts; (6) Right livelihood; (7) Right effort, and (8) Right concentration involving development of mind. These, successfully achieved, result in full or complete enlightenment. Because Buddhism is a way of life to the Buddhists and not merely a theory, the following of this path is believed essential for self-deliverance to each one. Buddha's thoughts in this may be summarized as "cease to do evil, learn to do good, cleanse your own heart."

(8) Impersonality of the Supernatural. A god with describable attributes is not the final reality, such reality is indescribable. However, Buddha, a human being, did become the All-Enlightened One, because the purpose of life is to achieve enlightenment. Therefore that state of consciousness, Nirvana, the complete extinction of selfhood, can be attained on earth. All men, as well as all other forms of life, possess the potentiality of enlightenment. Buddhism therefore says to each adherent "look within as you are Buddha in the process of becoming."

(9) Guidance of Buddha. Because the Eightfold Path is the way to Nirvana, the basic required faith in Buddhism is that a guide (Buddha) has trodden this way and it is therefore worthwhile to follow him. Buddhism requires that the whole man, not merely heart and mind, be developed equally.

(10) Inner Life. Buddhism emphasizes the need for meditation and mental concentration in the development of the inner qualities. It stresses that the subjective life is as important as external facts so that periods of inner activity are essential for a balance life. The Buddhist is not to get "caught up in the passing show". He must develop a watchful attitude to those circumstances which man creates so that he may keep his reactions always under control.

(11) Individual Responsibility. Since Buddha taught "work out your own salvation", Buddhism believes the authority for final truth to be the salvation of the individual. The individual must be his own final authority. In view of this belief, man suffers the consequences of his own acts. Moreover, prayer to Buddha or to any other god will not prevent an effect from following its course. (While taught as theory, popular Buddhism in Vietnam seems to modify this concept.)

In this respect, it ought to be remembered that Buddhist monks (bonzes) are teachers and examples. Only in popular Buddhism are the bonzes intermediaries between the individual and ultimate reality.

This same principle of Buddhism is the basis for "Buddhist tolerance" which is to be practiced toward adherents of other faiths and religions or philosophies. This tolerance is based upon the concept that each man is his own means of salvation, and no one has the right to interfere with another's journey toward that goal. It is only natural that this ideal is not always realized by all peoples in all places. But it is probably as well practiced by its adherents as are similar concepts by those of Judeo-Christian persuasion.

(12) Man's Life Situation. Buddhism is a system of thought and religion which attempts to explain existence and man's relation to it. In philosophy it claims to be neither pessimistic or escapist. It does insist on self-reliance while declaring man to be the creator of the conditions of his present life and the sole designer of his destiny.

Buddhist Virtues

The five colors of the Vietnamese Buddhist flag signify the five virtues which Buddhists believe vital. While there are differences of opinion as to which color might represent a particular virtue, the virtues themselves are
ideals held before the adherents by the Sangha. These virtues are developed as the adherent follows the Eightfold Middle Path and subdues the 108 desires or cravings which stand between man and Nirvana.

The moral quality most cherished by the Buddhist ideal is compassion. The use of this term infers a genuine concern for all living creatures as Buddhism makes no distinction between the life of man and that of animals, etc. Buddha told several stories of holy men who demonstrated this compassion by giving their lives to save the life of some animal. This quality is also demonstrated by the possession of the strain-cloth so that all drinking water can be strained to prevent the needless taking of even microscopic life. However, care is taken to illustrate the difference between deliberate killing and accidental killing. While the Buddhist theologians discuss these differences, the adherent of Buddhism in practice does not seem overly concerned about minor items and the Sangha (Order of Buddhist Clergy) has upon a number of occasions permitted or encouraged violence and loss of life when it was deemed necessary.

Patience is perhaps the second most important virtue of Buddhism. The quality of patience demonstrated in the daily life of the Vietnamese is almost unbelievable. Quietly, and without complaint, with a sense of certainty that everything eventually will work out, the peasantry waits for the appropriate action to occur. Since this virtue is so greatly stressed, the common folk of Vietnam take much cause before retaing murkry, instead of shouting, screaming or loudly swearing, they smile at their opponents or adversaries. Undoubtedly, this high regard for patience springs from the concepts of Karma.

Optimism is a virtue which many members of the Sangha feel is stressed. If misfortune occurs, the Buddhist adherent should consider it to be the consequence of the bad deeds of a previous existence which the Law of Karma extracts impersonally. Therefore, the individual has less of a debt to be paid off and can be happy and optimistic for the future. Others say that this virtue is courage, since it is courage that gives one strength to face the difficult and view the future with confidence.

Serenity as a virtue is best symbolized by the various statues of Buddha, especially those where he is seated with folded hands. To the Buddhist, serenity is a virtue which can be possessed only by those with purity of heart. Such purity may be developed by adherents as improvement of actions, thoughts, speech and intentions is realized. Serenity can be achieved only by the destruction of the desires which hinder freedom of mind; Nirvana cannot be achieved unless serenity is a fact.

Freedom is a virtue to be greatly sought. It is another freedom from desires, and release from tensions caused by fear, want, or possessions. The shaven head and the robe of the Buddhist monk are symbolic of this virtue. They signify renunciation of the possession of material things or normal desires. Inner freedom must be achieved in order to escape the Wheel of Reincarnation into Nirvana.

Dynamism, according to some bonzes, is another virtue to be sought. Dynamism is that quality by which the Buddhist not only seeks to escape repetitious existences, but seeks to help others achieve Enlightenment. Since Buddhism teaches man must be his own "saviour" from the Wheel of Life, this is a virtue of great value and one to be esteemed as worthy of admiration.

Buddha's Place In Vietnamese Buddhism

The members of the Sangha (monks, nuns, etc.), as well as the intellectuals (within Buddhism, know that Buddha is not "God" (that is the supreme power), nor did Buddha ever claim this status. Neither did he ever claim the power to reverse the unalterable law of cause and effect called KARMA with its impersonal outworking in each existence. Rather, Buddha, to them, is believed to be the Enlightened One, the symbol of what man can become. He is a teacher from whom men seeking freedom from the Wheel of Endless Existence might better learn how to escape into Nirvana.

But to the adherent of popular Vietnamese Buddhism, especially of the Mahayana school, Buddha seems to be very much a personal god. They appear to visit the pagodas to worship and make petitions of the One so majestically symbolized therein. Many Buddhist adherents believe that Buddha will help them in their various problems; that he will grant them protection, or children, etc. Many seem to be sure that Buddha can bring prosperity and long life. Their concept of Buddha seems to resemble the praying and answering God that Christianity affirms. Since all men have the opportunity to escape eventually into Nirvana and thereby become Buddhas, there is an obvious difference between concepts of the supreme being and the Christian God, but in much of everyday life, the attitude of worship, reverence toward
and confidence in Buddha is strangely similar to that expressed by many who live in the Judeo-Christian heritage.

C. BUDDHIST CEREMONIES

1. The Functions of the various ceremonies are: to venerate the Buddha idea; to regulate and maintain the Sangha necessary routine; to instruct the laity; and to provide links between the human-social order and the cosmic-natural order of all existences, etc.

2. Major Buddhist Sangha Ceremonies: These are several in number. Without using their Vietnamese names they are: (a) the initiation ceremony for novices following their period of probation; (b) ordination ceremonies for monks and nuns; (c) ceremonies which conclude the monastic residence or "retreat" (These normally take place at the end of the rainy season and are practiced by the Theravadists much more than among the Mahayana adherents); (d) the annual ceremony in which the laity dedicates cotton cloth to the monks which is used to make their robes (This, also, is more Theravadin than Mahayanist. Both schools are present in Vietnam); (e) periodic meetings at each new moon and full moon for sermon recitation and to hear the Teaching expounded and disciplinary rules repeated.

Buddhism has many ceremonies which involve both Sangha and laity. Normally, non-Buddhists are welcome as observers at any service where Buddhist laity is allowed. Basically, however, Buddhism does not emphasize collective worship which requires the assembly of many believers at one time. Each adherent is required to solve his own problems and seek escape from the Wheel of Life into Nirvana.

The Theravadists celebrate the Birth, Enlightenment, and Demise of Buddha on the same day of the year, usually in May. This school adheres to the belief that Buddha was born, received Enlightenment and died on the same day of different years. They commemorate all three events at the same time. The Mahayanist school in Vietnam celebrates Buddha's birthday on the 8th day of the 4th month of the Chinese lunar year. By way of contrast the Japanese, Tibetan and Mongolian calendars designate the occasion as the 4th day of the 6th lunar month. Buddhists in America believe Buddha's birthday to be April 8, his Enlightenment or Bodhi Day (named after the bodhi tree under which he sat when awaiting Enlightenment) as December 8 and Nirvana Day (date of his death or demise) as February 15. A detailed discussion of the various holidays and celebrations in Vietnam is given in a VIETNAMESE CALENDAR OF HOLIDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS IN VIETNAM published by SORO of the American University, Washington, D.C.

D. ROLES OF BUDDHISM

According to Buddhist spokesmen, Buddhism has many roles. These roles in simple terms include:

1. Helping all people to obtain Enlightenment and to realize Nirvana. This role requires concern for the public good so that the Sangha and lay associations conduct educational, cultural and welfare activities on many levels.

2. The utilization of Buddhist art in all its forms to promote Buddhism's idealism. This undoubtedly would include the understanding of art in its broadest terms, including architecture, music, etc. as well as in the traditional sense of pictures and sculpture.

3. To provide advice, guidance, humanitarian goals and values to society as expressed by the governments of society. Because wrong conduct can not be tolerated due to its inconsistency with Buddhist ideals, such conduct must be opposed, and if necessary resisted by force. The Sangha (Buddhist order of clergy of all levels) has supported war from time to time when such war was believed necessary. Such support has included material assistance in the forms of supplies, facilities and personnel.

4. The active participation in political affairs has been practiced in Asia by the Sangha members directly. They have encouraged the Buddhist laity to have active roles in politics. The leaders of Buddhism are deeply concerned about the origin, establishment, purpose, function, administration and goals of political power both in theory and practice.

E. DEFINITIONS AND EXPLANATION OF BUDDHIST TERMS

Buddhism is the "Middle Way of Life" in contrast to the extremes of indulgence or denial. It contends that the achievement of the perfect existence is obtained by a process of thought which was first taught, attained and exemplified by Buddha.
Major Buddhist Traditions are three in number although there are many denominations or sects within the major teachings:

(1) Theravada is the teaching of the "Theras" or elder monks, and is the closest form of early Buddhism in existence, according to its adherents. Theravada uses Pali as its basic sacred scriptural language.

(2) Mahayana is the "Larger", "Greater" or "Expanded Way" of obtaining Enlightenment and uses Sanskrit as its basic textual language. This is the prevalent form of Buddhism in Vietnam if the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai are excluded.

(3) Mantrayana/Vajrayana/Tantrism. Tantrism incorporates Hindu hymns and dances in erotic rites with worship of female divinities and mysticism while declaring Buddhahood can be attained through theurgic magical practices. Sanskrit and Tibetan are used as basic languages. While related to Mahayana, it is more to be found in its purer form in Tibet, Mongolia, etc., than in Vietnam where its major influence seems to be in funerals.

The difference of the major schools seem to be based more on social, geographic and economic factors than on widely differing basic concepts. This is evident as attention is given to the different forms of popular Buddhism in the various areas of Southeast Asia, or even within the same country.

The Three Jewels/Three Gems/Three Treasures are called Tiratana in Pali, the language in which Buddha spoke and the sacred language of Theravada, or Tri-ratna in Sanskrit, which is the Mahayana and Mantrayana sacred language. They are considered to be the basis of all Buddhist schools and the symbolically supreme act of veneration. Reference is often made to them collectively much as Americans use the expression "So help me God". The Three Jewels are:

(1) The Buddha (The Enlightened One) who conceived, taught and exemplified the Dharma/Dhamma/Karma. The Buddha, symbolized by the numerous statues, is the one who lived about 500 B.C. in Northern India, and is accepted as the originator of Buddhism.

(2) The Dhamma/Dharma/Karma is the teaching of Buddha given as doctrine. The concept of Karma contains the essence of Buddhism when combined with the Four Noble Truths. Karma declares that the sum total of a person's good and bad actions, with actions comprised of deeds, words and thoughts, determines the specific destiny of the next existence. It also affects the subsequent existences of the "rebirth" cycle. According to Karma, prior actions determine the conditions of man's present existence. Because his status is the result of his own actions, man must be his own savior from the recurring cycle of birth and death. Only by his own actions can he free himself from the Wheel of Existence and escape into Nirvana. Karma is an impersonal, unchangeable force not subject to modification by prayer, etc.

Karma is simply the belief or teaching that the moral order of the universe requires a good deed to have a good result and a bad deed to have a bad result. When expanded in ethical concepts, Karma infers that good or bad previous existences account for the present good or evil fortune, poverty, illness, etc. It is also the controlling law of the universe of which man is a passing part. Man is subject to Karma even as nature responds to its inherent laws. There is no escape known to Buddhism from the cause/effect concept of this law.

Within popular Buddhism, regardless of theological concepts, Karma is quite similar to the Hindu belief in the transmigration of the soul. Many Buddhists use the term "I' to speak of the on-going process. A major concern of the Buddhist is that his life force, the very self, will have to endure in future existences the results of actions committed in the past or present. The scale of future existences may be either upward or downward. Some adherents of popular Buddhism have remarked that one of the highest hopes of a woman is to be born as a man in a future existence, so that she may increase merit and thereby escape into Nirvana.

Karma seems to say to the non-adherent westerner that man reaps his own sowing; rewards or consequences are appropriate in quantity and quality to actions; good merit cannot balance out bad merit because both run their independent courses.

(3) The Sangha is the monastic order (organization) developed by the disciples of the Buddha as they followed his example and expanded his teachings. The Sangha is composed of the bonzes, or monks who are clergymen (incorrectly called priests) and is supported basically by the Buddhist laity through gifts which gain merit for the giver, or in some countries through taxation.

(a) The bonzes in Theravada tradition may have this role for an indefinite time, from a few weeks to a life-time vocation. Normally the bonzes are vegetarians, but may eat meat upon rare occasions. Their shaven heads and robes of yellow or saffron symbolize their renunciation of world pleasures as they follow
the example of the Buddha. Besides the saffron and yellow robes, bonzes may wear either a brown or off-shade white robe.

These monks do not usually officiate at weddings, though they may be present and recite Buddhist sacred scripture or give sermons and offer congratulations. However, for deaths, the bonze leads the funeral rites in the home, and at the burial or cremation. He leads the religious rites after burial, including those on the first anniversary of a death. In rural areas, monks may be school teachers, or serve as bankers, advisors in economic, cultural, social, political and religious affairs. Often the monk is the best educated figure in his community and is therefore one of its guiding counselors. While participating in and conducting religious festivals, ceremonies or observances, they perform many functions and services for Buddhist adherents. The monks may lead the community in troubled times in solemn ceremonies to the pantheon of spiritual beings that form part of the traditions of Mahayana Buddhism.

Besides allowing the laity to earn merit placing rice in their "merit-bowls", the bonzes care for the temples, pagodas, wats and monasteries. They also assist or direct charitable activities such as orphanages, hospitals, welfare centers, etc. More important to Buddhists, the bonzes are examples of the Buddhist Middle Way of Life in the journey to Nirvana.

(b) Nuns have been part of the Sangha since the Buddha established the role of nuns in his lifetime. Nuns observe similar, but more strict, rules than bonzes. Their work is primarily in temples, pagodas, teaching, nursing and welfare work. The saffron, yellow, brown or white robes of the monks are quite familiar, in contrast to the seldom seen white robe and shaven or closely cropped hair of the Buddhist nun. Her appearance symbolizes acceptance of Eight Buddhist Principles which include: avoid unchastity; avoid drinking fermented liquor; avoid falsehood; avoid unseasonable meals; do not dance; do not play music or sing, do not see plays, movies, etc. Within Buddhism, her role is always subordinate to that of men, in contrast to the seldom seen white robe and shaven or closely cropped hair of the Buddhist nun. Her appearance symbolizes acceptance of Eight Buddhist Principles which include: avoid unchastity; avoid drinking fermented liquor; avoid falsehood; avoid unseasonable meals; do not dance; do not play music or sing, do not see plays, movies, etc. Within Buddhism, her role is always subordinate to that of men, though in Theravada Buddhism her status is more acceptable than in Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhism.

The Sangha has monks, nuns, disciples, and lay devotees who may be compared to the brothers of Roman Catholicism, or to devout women who devote their total life to the church, but who do not qualify as nuns. Leadership within the Sangha is normally elected by the members. These leaders have passed certain examinations and are usually quite senior in years of service. Consideration is also given to experience and ability. Rank within the Sangha may be indicated by fans or by clothing, but they are not ordinarily distinctive enough for the non-trained observer to note.

In addition to the Sangha, Buddhism has a growing number of laymen and women who take an active part in Buddhist organizational affairs. They work in schools, hospitals, youth work, and other cultural, social, religious concerns of Buddhism.

Merit And Merit Making: The Buddhist teaching of dana, which is giving for the sake of others without expecting compensation, has been largely replaced in popular Buddhism by the prevalent Asian folk belief in rewards and retribution. Thus the "merit-making" system is operative in popular Buddhist ethics due to its Karma concepts. Due to the axiomatic "By one's own good deeds, salvation must be won", the acquisition of Merit seems to be the basic motive of many religious acts. It also underlies much of daily social life. Many of the peasants assert that if the next incarnation is to be in a happier sphere, merit must be stored up. Merit may be gained by giving food to the monks, giving them robes, listening to sermons, giving money to the pagoda, becoming a monk, or even giving freedom to captive birds, turtles, etc.

Bad merit or demerits must eventually be worked off through suffering if Nirvana is to be achieved. In part, the concepts of Karma seem to result in a sense of fatalism. Man is the product of previous lives so actions in the present life cannot make too much difference.

The merit acquired by any act is dependent upon the following factors: the spirit in which the donor grants his gifts, and the worthiness of the recipient. Gifts to animals yield some merit; to evil men, a bit more; to good men, even a greater merit; to monks, a great value; and gifts to Buddha gain the greatest merit. These recipients of gifts or good deeds may be listed under 14 different categories. Merit is gained by the giver whether or not the recipient is in actual need of the gift.

Merit can be transferred from one person to another. When a boy becomes a novice, or when a man is ordained as a monk, they give merit to their parents. In giving one's merit to another, one's own merit is believed actually to be increased.
Nirvana: is the highest state to which a Buddhist may aspire. It is a state of being that is outside or beyond the cycle of rebirth. An exact definition of Nirvana seems unobtainable since Buddha refrained from describing this state. When pressed for answers he gave parables and stated that it is the estate which his disciples should strive to reach. It is also the state in which the Buddha's followers believe him now to be as a result of the Enlightenment which he achieved. It was the lack of clear definitions of Nirvana that created the schism that resulted in the Theravada and Mahayana traditions. In simple terms, Nirvana is the final release from Karma, the law that sustains the endless cycle of existence with its births and deaths. Nirvana can be obtained only with long and laborious effort, self denial, good deeds, thoughts, purification through successive lives and much perseverance. "Salvation" into Nirvana is the result of one's own efforts, and cannot be equated with the Christian concept of heaven.

F. RELIGIOUS LANDMARKS, SYMBOLS AND ARTIFACTS

Throughout Vietnam religious beliefs are so interwoven in daily life that little can be envisioned that does not include them. Traditionally the Wat, the pagoda, the Monastery, the "Spirit" Shrine, the communal house, in their respective locations have been the focus or center of village life. Birth, childhood, festivals, marriage, death, lunar occasions, as well as health, prosperity, posterity, travels, planning, house building, and similar events are very closely tied to religion. An understanding of the visible landmarks and symbols of Vietnamese religions will thus be helpful.

Wat: In all villages or communities where Buddhism is established, the area of the pagoda or temple, where the monks live, where the Buddhist school is, where an orphanage or "Old Folks' home is found, is called a "Wat", and has special significance to Buddhist adherents and to the others in nearby areas.

Pagoda (Vietnamese Buddhist Temple): This building is normally the largest, the best constructed, and the most ornate one in the village. Even in towns and cities its appearance quickly sets it apart from all other buildings. Pagodas are normally constructed with voluntary labor provided by adherents seeking merit for future existences, and construction funds are usually gifts from those seeking special "merit". Buddhism teaches that each individual must earn his own "eventual salvation in Nirvana", and constructing or funding the pagoda provide a good means by which merit can be gained for this end. The pagodas of Vietnam are normally constructed in the highly decorated style of the Chinese; and often utilize bits of glass and chinaware to give color and glitter. Often figures of dragons, the phoenix, and other legendary figures are interwoven with the accepted symbols of Buddhism, which besides the various statues of Buddha, include the "Wheel of Life" and the "Chu Van" (the "swastika" symbol which reminds the Westerner of the Hitler regime).

Wheel of Life: This is one of the earliest symbols of Buddhism, and consists of a circle (wheel) with eight or twelve divisions (spokes). The circle denotes the Buddhist concept of repeated births and endless existence. Eight "spokes" signify the Eightfold Path to reach Nirvana; and twelve "spokes" denote either the twelve "Principles of Buddhism", or the twelve-year calendar within an endless cycle of time.

Chu Van: This symbol is often found on Buddhist holy medals, on pagodas as decorations, and on the chests of the various statues of Buddha. It is the symbol of Enlightenment, the achievement of Nirvana. The Buddhist is taught that this sign will appear spontaneously upon the chest of the Enlightened. English speaking Vietnamese may tell you that it means "peace", but in reality it connotes a form of tranquility possible only to one who has passed beyond human emotions and has thus achieved Nirvana. The Chu Van is found in the following three forms:

![Chu Van](image)

Buddha Statue: This key symbol of Buddhism is found in various poses in nearly every pagoda as a central figure, and often throughout the pagoda area. It signifies the ideal of perfect compassion, perfect wisdom, etc., possible only to one who has experienced Enlightenment.
While Buddha is not a god to the learned Buddhist, he undoubtedly fills this role in popular practice. In any case, the Buddha statue is held in sacred esteem, to the extent that this word to the Navy/Marine Team is not only sufficient but essential: TREAT SUCH STATUES AS YOU WOULD THE RELIGIOUS ARTICLES IN YOUR OWN CHURCH.

Gongs: These are used in Buddhist pagodas and homes for three basic purposes: to announce the time of a service or meeting; to mark the different phases or parts of a ceremony; and to set the tempo for chanting as an aid to increase one's meditation. The location of the gongs depends on usage, but they are usually found on the altar.

Bell: Located in or near the porch of the pagoda. The bell may be rung or beaten to inform the community that a meeting or special event is about to occur.

Drum: The drum of the pagoda is usually located on the porch of the sacred building, and is used to alert the surrounding community that a service or meeting is about to begin or has ended. The drum is normally sounded when dignitaries are present and participating in the meeting. According to Vietnamese practice, anyone hearing the gongs, bell or the drum is thereby invited to attend the event.

Flowers: Flowers are widely used for devotions in Vietnam, be it for family altars, graves, for worship in the pagoda, or for presentations when calling upon bonzes or older relatives. In the temple, flowers symbolize the shortness of life and the constant change inherent in existence. One of the meditations the adherent may offer when presenting flowers is:

These flowers I offer in the memory of the Buddha the supremely Enlightened One. These flowers are now fair in form, glorious in color, sweet in scent. Yet all will soon have passed away, their fair form withered, the bright hues faded, their scent gone. It is even so with all conditioned things which are subject to change and suffering and are unreal. Realizing this, may we attain Nirvana, perfect peace, which is everlasting.

Incense: Incense is symbolic of the spirit of self-purification and self-dedication. Incense produces a sweet fragrance, but only during burning. Similarly, as the adherent dedicates his body for a higher purpose, so will he diffuse fragrance. Incense is burned by the Buddhist as an offering in memory of Buddha, and as an aid to or a form of meditation. When Joss Sticks are burned, there are usually three to symbolize the Three Gems of Buddhism: The Buddha, Karma, and the Sangha. As incense fills all spaces, so the Buddhist hopes the moral perfection of the Enlightened Ones may be seen in all the actions of mind, body, and speech.

Lights (Candles or Lamps): Even as light drives away darkness, light from candles and lamps symbolizes Buddha's teachings which give light to the mind and drive away ignorance, replacing it with Enlightenment. To some, light signifies the hope that once they are enlightened, their lives will help enlighten others, even as they were helped by Buddha.

Food, Wine, Water: These are placed before the altars of Buddha, and symbolize that the best is first shared with Him. Only the essence of the food is essential for purposes of worship, so that the items themselves may later be retrieved and used as food by the worshipper. Foodstuffs placed in Vietnamese pagodas are generally simple. More elaborate settings, including prepared dishes such as roasted pig, are common to Chinese pagodas in Vietnam.

Merit Bowls: Better known as "Begging Bowls", a highly incorrect term used only by westerners, Merit Bowls are a means by which Buddhist bonzes receive food for their daily repast. The practice of receiving food from the laity reflects the bonze's vow of poverty; and the gifting of the bonze with food provides a means of gaining merit for the laity. It is for this reason that the bonze does not thank the laity for the gifts; and that the laity feels grateful for the opportunity to earn merit.

Robes: The robe of the bonze is his identifying "uniform"; and because it is usually colorful, it immediately sets him apart as a man of religion. Differing colors of robes have no particular significance to the non-adherent, but among Theravada Buddhists only saffron (orange) seems to be worn. Bonzes of other Buddhist groups wear shades of white, brown, or yellow, without reference to order or status. However, the color yellow seems to be preferred for worship services and religious or civic ceremonies.

Buddhist Beads: These consist of a string of 108 beads, each symbolizing one of the 108 desires or cravings which must be overcome before one can become Enlightened. Although the beads are given other meaning, the larger number of Buddhist adherents and bonzes agree to this major symbolism. The beads are used in meditation.
The Buddhist Flag in Vietnam is composed of six vertical strips of equal width. The first five, from left to right, are colored blue, yellow, red, white, and pink or light orange. The sixth strip is composed of five horizontal strips of equal width, with the same colors and in the same order, from bottom to top. To the Buddhist, each color signifies a different virtue; but there is no consensus about which color denotes which virtue.

Lustral Water (Buddhist “holy-water”): is water which has been poured over a Buddha statue under proper conditions to gain some of the mystical effectiveness of the Buddha’s virtues. This water may be used to pour over the hands of a corpse at funerals, the hands of a bridal couple at wedding festivities, to sprinkle about a newly built house, or sometimes as medication for the ill. The American should treat this lustral water much as Roman Catholics treat Holy Water in order to avoid giving any offense.

Lotus/Lotus Blossom: The lotus bud or blossom early became the more favored symbol of Buddha’s teachings. Sometimes rooted in mud and mire or pools of stagnant water, it develops without being stained by its lowly environment. Buddha used it to symbolize the fact that the human spirit can strive for purity regardless of circumstances. He used its four stages of growth to symbolize the stages through which people pass in their growth toward Enlightenment. The lotus is a quite popular offering to be given bonzes or taken to the pagoda or temple. The devout may be seen seated in worship listening to a sermon recitation and clasping an unopened lotus bud in folded hands. The seed of the lotus may be used either green or dry as sweet food. Its roots may be used to form parts of salads or soups or candied as a bit of desert. The lotus is often seen as decoration in pagodas, temples, graves and in art works of many types in Vietnam.

G. CONTRASTS OF THEOLOGY IN BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY

1. Essential beliefs: Buddhists often perceive Buddhism as a teaching with its Three Gems being Buddha the Teacher, the Dharma (Karma) or Teachings, and the Sangha (Order of Monks) which has preserved and transmitted the Dharma (Karma or Teachings).

Christians normally consider their essential beliefs to be God’s revelation, with both Old and New Testaments carrying the ring of “Thus saith the Lord”.

The two faiths have contrasting concepts of religion. To its adherents, Christianity is more than a teaching: it is the proclaiming of the Good News of the Incarnate and redeeming God in love and grace who may be accepted by man for both abundant and eternal life, with the news of this Power being the result of revelation. Buddhism is essentially a teaching “system” of knowledge that is metaphysical, moral, psychological and intuitive, with Buddha as the Great Teacher (and example) of a “Way” (The Middle Way) that “connects” and “identifies” man with his universe.

2. Divine Being: Buddhism does not accept the existence of a creative sustaining and redeeming God. Rather, its devotees are encouraged to accept the world (universe) as it is; then to ascertain means of following the pathway from the predicament of man in a world of suffering to escape from the “Wheel of Life” (Endless cycle of birth, death, rebirth, etc.). Christianity accepts God as basic and essential, as the beginning and end of all being; with no equivalent concepts in Buddhism, the contrast is evident.

3. History: Buddhism and Christianity hold opposing concepts of history. Buddha accepted the Indian cosmology of a repeating cycle of time. Since Buddha did not feel that knowledge of the origin of the world contributed to religious life, he apparently refused to discuss it. The concept of time advocated by Buddhism seems to be basic to the doctrine of a continuous cycle of existence. This doctrine necessitates rebirth but it is different from the Brahminic transmigration of the soul. Buddha taught that the “human life-force” has endured an almost endless cycle of previous existence in the past, while the future holds a similar fate unless Nirvana is achieved through an escape from the Wheel of Existence. Buddhist theology also discusses just what is reborn or transmitted in this repeating cycle in accord with each person’s individual Karma - “life-force” to the theologian, but this is much like the reborn individual within popular Buddhism. History that is cyclical, or self-repeating, tends to deprive nations, individuals, and events of significant importance as the endlessly repeated events, like the passing spokes of a rotating wheel, do not warrant great attention.

In contrast, Christianity begins and ends history with the presence and power of God. To its adherents, God is the Creator, Sustainer and man’s Redeemer so that history has both
pattern and purpose. To the Christian, history has significance because God works with and through humanity. Man's goal therefore is not escape, but reconciliation with God so that man may reach his fullest humanity; his value is not his tangible worth, but that which the Eternal God gives him.

This contrasts with the non-personal force which Buddhism accepts as the universal power. Through this force each man must be his own saviour as he works out his individual Karma in accord with that non-changing force. This concept is modified in practice by popular Buddhism, as many Buddhists seem to accept Buddha as a god-like power who can and does provide protection, care and support at times.

4. Salvation: Buddhism teaches that Enlightenment is reached by self-effort through following the Eightfold Path (The Middle Way). Christianity maintains that salvation comes by the grace of God.

5. Life's meaning: Buddhism regards this as fundamental and of universal concern. Buddha said: "I came to teach suffering or sorrow and the escape from suffering" (Pothagada Sutta p. 29). "This is a noble truth of suffering; birth is suffering, old age is suffering, death is suffering" (Vinaya, Mahavagga 1.6.10).

This is a value judgment based on the concept that the peace of mind and heart cannot be realized unless there is a permanency and unchangability. Thus the Four Noble Truths, the doctrine of suffering and its cure, are basic to all Buddhist thought.

The Christian thinks of life as good, as a gift of God, to be lived and enjoyed in accordance with a Divine plan, even when recognizing the presence and influence of evil and its consequence. The Christian affirms that man, while having many flaws, holds the potential of growth and development through the indwelling God.

6. Tranquility and Peace: Buddhism praises the peace and tranquility which are the result of meditation and quiet reflection, while Christianity urges that the life of inner joy is a gift of Divinity. The Buddhist concept of the ideal goal of tranquility in its fullest and ultimate concept is Nirvana. The quest of joy and peace for the Christians has its roots in the sense of forgiveness and reconciliation with God; this reaches its highest completion in "heaven" where there is continuous and eternal community and unspeakable happiness in the presence of God.

7. God: Buddhism has no God in the Christian sense - no transcendant, personal, redeeming God. The Buddhist must therefore find within himself the purpose, wisdom, and significance of the ultimate, as well as release and peace. While the Buddhist has the example of Buddha in this quest, he must of himself provide his own release from the endless round of rebirth and suffering. However, within the popular forms of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, many adherents seem to believe that Buddha can help them, even though escape from the Wheel of Life must be achieved through one's own success in accord with the Law of Karma.

Within Christianity, God is generally presumed as the basic fact of existence. Because He is, man may have a way of salvation. Having come of God, man may return to Him. Though man may wander far and wide he is not an orphan, though only in conscious union with God can humanity achieve its ultimate destiny.

Because Christianity contends that salvation is possible only through Jesus as the Son of God, it is an exclusive religion. Buddhism, not having a personal creative, sustaining, and redeeming God, affirms that man as part of His universe may gain release from an endless existence and into Nirvana by following the Eightfold Path. While appreciating the basic difference of concept, syncretism of Buddhism and Christianity would seem to be impossible due to irreconcilable concepts of God.

8. Tolerance - Forgiveness: Buddhism teaches tolerance and Christianity advocates forgiveness as ethical virtues and goals. The difference of these two qualities may create a chasm difficult to bridge. However, the practice of these two qualities by persons of the different faiths creates an atmosphere of cordial rapport regardless of possible implications of the terms themselves.

9. Prayer: The Christian concept of prayer involves communication with an omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, prayer-hearing and answering God who cares enough for man that He gave His Son. Buddhism does not perceive of a power with these capabilities in its basic theology. So the prayers which may be said by some adherents in contemporary Buddhism seem to be a modification of basic teachings.

10. Sin: Christianity believes sin to be an alienation from Divinity created either by man in his current state or by transgression of Divine Will. Because Buddhism does not recognize such a Divine Power to who each man is personally responsible, "Sin" as understood in the Christian context does not exist.
11. Worship: Christianity is a worship in which men are enjoined to have concern for fellow-man as a child of God. The adherent worships as an individual in a collective act regardless of economic status. Because the Buddhist adherent must work out his own Karma, and is not basically involved with others in this act, Buddhism tends to be a more solitary form of worship. Again in Vietnam, this is modified by the many influences.

H. AREAS OF SIMILARITY WITHIN BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY

1. Both religions are Asian in origin. (1) Both founders taught their concepts by parables, similes, proverbs, and sermons. Their forms of speech and thought images are sometimes remarkably similar. (2) The two founders recognized common problems; but thought them to be of different origins and, therefore, as having different solutions.

2. Both religions provide guidance to man; pose metaphysical and moral questions; are reforms of established religions; theoretically oppose legalism and meaningless ceremonialism.

3. Both seek to point out values believed to be permanent, supreme and all-encompassing. Neither Jesus or Buddha left any actual writings, yet what each taught by deed, word, character and through disciples forms the bases of their two religions, each of which now has millions of adherents.

4. Both attract people with similar temperaments: of a devotional nature, with transcendent ideals and capable of voluntary renunciation of worldly aspirations.

5. Both resulted in major organizations, i.e., the Christian Church and the Sangha or Buddhist Order of Monks and its associations of laity.

6. Both founders gave commissions to followers requiring missionary activity, with messages aimed at all mankind. Both are still involved in varying degrees of effort aimed at the conversion of unbelievers.

7. Both Christianity and Buddhism have been state-religions at various times and places, although there is little evidence that either founder favored such establishments.

8. Both Buddhism and Christianity have been divided into major divisions; Buddhism into Theravada, Mahayana and numerous sects; and Christianity into Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Protestantism and the sects.

9. Both religions developed monasticism (monks and nuns); suffered decline, absorption and impurities of the faith; both have largely disappeared from the lands of their births.

10. Both religions agree in a number of areas in the assessment of man's condition and predicament in a temporal world.

   a. Both agree that man's current life is short and filled with sorrow.

   b. Both religions repudiate man-made materialism and materialistic values as being of primary or supreme value; each asserts values and goals that transcend this present life and its achievements. Christianity has no qualms with regard to material acquisition as long as this is kept in balanced proportion so that spiritual growth is not retarded. Buddhism deplores the 108 desires, and, as an ideal, encourages as essential for Nirvana the suppression of these desires or cravings.

   c. Each religion teaches that evil, in the form of anger, cruelty, greed, lust and desire, is found in the heart of man. Both offer solutions to these conditions, but with radically different means and methods.

11. Both Buddhism and Christianity stress that life and reflective thought are significant.

   a. Within Christianity human life is important because man can commune with God since he is in God's image. He is given access to a future that transcends death as a gift of the Divine Being. Each individual may claim this gift. Buddhism teaches that man's life is so full of dynamic forces and vitality - consciousness, deeds, will and memory - that life simply cannot cease at physical demise (death), but must continue through rebirth. Only the one who obtains Enlightenment can bring life processes to a halt. This Enlightenment can be gained only by the greatest of detachment and personal discipline.

   b. Both religions attach genuine importance, not only to this physical life, but also to those qualities which transcend it.

   c. Each religion teaches that mental processes are involved in spiritual growth; the Tripitaka (Teachings of Buddha) stress right thinking, right analysis, etc., while the Christian Scriptures say "As a man thinketh, so is he".

   d. Both religions stress the concept of cause and effect. Buddhism does this through the Law of Karma as well as the Law of the Seed and the Fruit, while Christianity observes, "As a man soweth, that shall he also reap".
I. ETHICS OF BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY

It is in the area of ethics that the agreement between Christianity and Buddhism is greatest; particularly so if the philosophy rather than the practice is considered. For instance:

1. Both Buddhism and Christianity are ethical religions.
2. Both stress that sincere attempts at moral growth are essential if man is to achieve the ultimate goal, be it reconciliation with God or Nirvana, even though moral perfection is not an ultimate goal in and of itself.
3. Both religions stress the existence of transcendent law: Karma for the Buddhists; "God's Will" for the Christians. Adherents believe that the law cannot be flouted, dismissed or ignored without serious consequence to individuals or society. Buddhism emphasizes the importance of deeds and the acquisition of "merit" (the fruit of right action), while to the Protestant Christians, observance of the Law is the result of commitment of faith, with "works" being the result of faith, rather than a prerequisite of salvation.
4. The voluntary renunciation of material possessions and pleasure is one of the highest forms of "merit-making" to the Buddhist; the Buddhist bonze is supposed to have only his robes (given to him), his merit-bowl, a razor, a cloth for straining water to prevent needless killing, etc. In addition, numerous voluntary vows may be followed or given up at will, particularly among Theravadists. The Christian also sometimes voluntarily renounces certain possessions and desires which he believes to be incompatible with his Christian development.
5. It appears that popular Buddhism in Vietnam is more interested in those ethical actions that result in rebirth under improved conditions and status than in an urgent seeking of Nirvana. The Christian understanding of "heaven" cannot be equated with Nirvana, as the two concepts are radically different.

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PERSONAL RESPONSE PROJECT FILES
BUDDHISM

A Buddha statue. Similar statues are found in every Buddhist place of worship.

Buddhist Wheel of Life on gate of Cao Dai Temple in Danang.
VI. ISLAM

Islam, the religion founded by the Prophet Mohammed in 612 A.D. in the Arabian deserts, is also found in Vietnam and other parts of Southeast Asia. It seems to have reached this area in two distinct waves. The first incursion was during the heyday of Arabic development when sea-faring Moslem traders carried both merchandise and their faith as they traveled and traded along the coastal areas of the sea. Evidence of their presence are still being discovered in Vietnam and elsewhere. The second wave of Islam to enter the Southeast Asia area, including Vietnam, was that created by the Indian Moslem merchants of Gujarat and Bengal. These adherents of the fiery desert prophet of Allah, like their Hindu fellow merchants, were skillful tradesmen and exponents of their faith so that Islam became a part of the religious scene, and is still interwoven in the lives of many Vietnamese.

The adherents of Islam in the Middle East blunted and stalled the drive of the Crusaders to free the Holy Lands from the "infidel" Moslems; therefore the Moslems of the Far East including Southeast Asia offered tempting targets to the Portuguese of the 14th and 15th centuries. The attempts to overwhelm the Moslem settlements and to destroy the Islamic influenced trading areas undoubtedly hastened and encouraged the amalgamation of the stern doctrines of Mohammed with the pervasive religious forces in Vietnam and other areas of Southeast Asia. This union of religious concepts and practices has so changed Islam among some of its Vietnamese adherents that it is doubtful if a Moslem from the Bible Lands would have much affinity with them.

To the western observer of the religious scene, it is quite obvious that the Vietnamese variety of Islam is influenced by Animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and other concepts or practices quite different than those found at Mecca, Medina, Damascus or Cairo. The Islamic mosque in Saigon is quite similar to those found in other areas of the world, but most of the mosques found in Vietnam have Hindu-influenced architecture, as illustrated by the Hindu-type "onion" bulb minarets from which the Muezzin or temple crier might call the adherents to worship and prayer.

Within Vietnam there seem to be few, if any, ethnic Chinese or Vietnamese Moslem adherents. The faith within the country is made up basically of those who come from Moslem countries as business men or government employees, and human remnants of by-gone glory like some of the Cham. But since the Chams are found in a number of locations within Vietnam, even as they once controlled the entire coast of Vietnam northward to Canton, China, awareness of Islamic presence may help to provide understanding and a more accurate evaluation of the religious dynamics of personality revealed in the complex culture of Vietnam.

Since the Chams are the people apparently most influenced by Islam in Vietnam now (the same is true also of the Cham and Hinduism), extended discussions of Islam in faith and practice among them is a part of the Cham study in THE PEOPLE OF THE TRIBES OF SOUTH VIETNAM.
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PERSONAL RESPONSE PROJECT FILES
As religious beliefs must be understood before one can appreciate social customs, behavior patterns, value systems, taboos, etc., a brief study of Roman Catholicism in Vietnam is relevant. This is especially true in view of the fact that Roman Catholicism is the oldest form of Christianity in Vietnam. As a factor in Vietnamese history for several centuries, it has been and now is a religious force which requires the attention of those who seek to understand the internal situation.

The Roman Catholic Church stated that, as of the end of 1965, 10.5% (approximately 1,680,000) of all the South Vietnamese Republic's present population are members. Therefore, the Church, influencing its people by leadership in moral, ethical, spiritual, and educational realms, constitutes a force which must be considered in the political, military, social, and economic decisions of an awakening nation. In 1966 the Roman Catholic Church of South Vietnam had two Archbishops with administrative offices at Saigon and Hue, and twenty Bishops who oversaw the pastoral work of 1,771 priests and the work of 4,926 nuns of the various orders. Across the 17th Parallel, the Roman Catholic Church has an Archbishop and an archdiocese at Hanoi, some nine dioceses and thirteen Bishops; but this study is oriented basically to South Vietnam, except where the Church's Vietnamese history requires inclusion of the north since the church early established in Tonkin a strong base. The various decrees affecting Catholicism were issued by the royal rulers dwelling at Hanoi for most of Roman Catholicism's Vietnamese history.

Spokesmen of the Church point out that the theology of the Church is universal and therefore no differences exist insofar as mass, etc., are involved. They also observe that cultural patterns not in conflict with Church law or theology may be practiced by adherents of the faith. Thus the ancestor shelf of veneration with minor physical modifications and emphasis is found in the home of nearly every Vietnamese except for the animistic tribespeople and the Protestants.

The comparatively strong educational program of the Church tends to place many of its graduates near the top of economic, cultural, political and academic areas of Vietnamese life except where the dynamics of religious forces gravitate against them. As governmental educational institutions develop and assume a molding influence, the effect of Church-oriented education will not be so obvious, which may lessen the tension which currently seems to exist in varying degrees throughout South Vietnam.

The Church's figures of 101,010 catechists, 189,930 baptisms and 19,293 marriages for 1963 is considered about normal according to one Vietnamese Roman Catholic Bishop. Yet the course of the war and political strife undoubtedly has an effect upon the Church even as it does upon the individual Vietnamese throughout Vietnam. While the death rate or apostasy figures have not been included, they are involved in computation of Church growth according to hierarchy spokesmen.

DATES OF IMPORTANCE WITHIN ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN VIETNAM

1533: The Edict of Le-Trang-Ton that forbade the introduction of Catholicism into the province of Nam-Dinh, (now in North Vietnam).
1550: The landing of Gaspar de Santa Cruz, a Roman Catholic Priest, at Con-Cao in the province of HaTien, South Vietnam, after sailing from Malacca.
1580: While South Vietnam was still largely peopled by the Chams and Khmers, Franciscans came from the Philippines and settled in Central Vietnam.
1615: Establishment by the Society of Jesus of a mission in Central Vietnam, staffed by Jesuits from Japan.
1624: Arrival in Central Vietnam of the Jesuit priest, Alexandre de Rhodes, the author of the current Vietnamese alphabet and an important figure in Vietnamese history.
1625: King Sai-Vuong issued an edict against missionaries.

1627: Alexandre de Rhodes moved to Tonkin (in North Vietnam); his mission seemed extremely successful.

1629: Trinh-Trang, King of Tonkin, forbade conversion to Christianity upon pain of death; and in 1630 expelled Alexandre de Rhodes, who returned to Central Vietnam.

1645: Some Roman Catholics are martyred and Alexandre de Rhodes is expelled from Cochinchina.

1646: With the encouragement and support of a Catholic Viceroy of Kwangsi (China), Roman Catholicism is defended in Tonkin; a number of conversions take place.

1650: Alexandre de Rhodes urges the Society of Congregation for Propagation of the Faith to send Bishops to Vietnam in order to establish churches and train Vietnamese clergy.

1651: The first printing of a Vietnamese-Latin catechism in Rome using the Vietnamese alphabet devised by Alexander de Rhodes.

1658: Roman Catholic adherents through baptism estimated at better than one quarter of a million: with the exception of two missionaries, all missionaries expelled from Tonkin.

1659: The beginning of the Apostolic Vicariates for Cochinchina and Tonkin with Lambert de la Motte for the first and Pallu for the second location.

1665: At least forty Roman Catholic martyrs, and a new exile for missionaries.

1666: Beginning of a floating seminary for clergy by vicar-general Monsignor Pallu.

1668: Ordained the first two Tonkin Vietnamese priests and the first two Cochinchina Vietnamese priests with ordination being performed in what is now Thailand.

1670: Organization of Synod in Tonkin. Nine local priests were available for this event which took place on 14 February.

1672: Organization of the first synod in Cochinchina on February 12. Also seems to have been some disagreement requiring settlement between French missionaries and Portuguese Christians in area.

1674 and 1675: The first attempt by the Roman Catholic Church of a mission to the Montagnards or Tribespeople.

1676: The arrival of the Spanish Dominicans in Tonkin.

1678: Oath of obedience to Apostolic Vicars imposed by Pope on all Roman Catholic missionaries.

1680: Reorganization of Church in Vietnam placed Monsignor Lambert de la Motte in charge of entire area.

1689: Society of Jesus successful in achieving abrogation of oath for their order.

1698: Both Tonkin and Cochinchina have some persecution of Catholics but growth of Church continues.

1712: Apostolic Vicar departed.

1719: 700 churches destroyed with martyrdom of Vietnamese priests and 2 foreign Jesuits.

1737: Additional Jesuits lose their heads in the capital of Tonkin.

1745: Spanish Dominicans also martyred.

1778: Due to help rendered the future Emperor Gia-Long, and agreement signed, the French landed at Tourane (now Danang) and Paulo-Condor.

1798: Martyrdom of additional Vietnamese priests.

1802: The unification of Vietnam under the Emperor Gia-Long gave Roman Catholics comparative freedom and the Church had about 300,000 people on its record.

1825: Emperor Minh-Mang forbade missionaries to enter Vietnam, which caused French intervention that created indignation and open hostility.


1840: When persecution slackened at this time, the Church claimed 420,000 members in Vietnam.

1851: A new edict by Tur-Duc against the Roman Catholics resulted in more than 90,000 of the laity being killed as well as more than one hundred priests.

1856: Treaty between French and Vietnamese Tur-Duc provided some liberty for Vietnamese Roman Catholics.

1883: French regime provided cessation of persecution of Roman Catholics.

1890: The Church claimed over 70,000 Roman Catholic converts for year.
The Roman Catholic Dioceses of South Vietnam including Archdioceses of Hue' and Saigon.

The diocese of Saigon was sub-divided in 1965 into three dioceses with these being Saigon, Xuan-loc, and Phu-Cuong.

Exact area of each diocese is given on statistical pages of this study.
1933: The first Vietnamese national consecrated as a Bishop.

1947: First recorded martyrdom of Roman Catholics by Viet Minh partisans.

1954: Partition of Vietnam; with 650,000 Roman Catholics immigrating to South Vietnam from north of 17th Parallel; there are about twice as many Roman Catholics in South Vietnam as in North Vietnam.


1960: The Church established a hierarchy for all of Vietnam with three archdioceses (Hanoi, Hue’, and Saigon) and three additional dioceses with Apostolic Delegate located in Saigon.

1963: Established the diocese of Danang.

1965: Division of Saigon Diocese into the dioceses of Saigon, Xuan-Loc, and Phuc-Cuong.

1966: With ordination of another bishop, the Church in South Vietnam had 20 Bishops, 5 French and 15 Vietnamese, while in North Vietnam there were 13 Vietnamese Bishops for a total of 33 Bishops in the two Vietnams.

NOTE: More information could be added to each date and the intervening years, but this review covers the major Church events to give the setting and understanding of various historical forces so that the current struggles can be better understood and evaluated.

### ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESES IN NORTH VIETNAM

Because the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy of Vietnam includes North Vietnam insofar as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned, the population of the dioceses of North Vietnam is included with the percentage of Roman Catholic members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Roman Catholics</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hanoi</td>
<td>2,500,000</td>
<td>155,000</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang-son</td>
<td>350,000</td>
<td>2,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hai-phong</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
<td>54,817</td>
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<td>Bac-ninh</td>
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<td>1,660,891</td>
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Grand totals

10 dioceses 14,665,891 833,468 5.6

### ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESES IN SOUTH VIETNAM

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<tr>
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Grand totals

13 dioceses 14,183,844 1,454,842 10.2

Totals for both Vietnams 28,849,735 *2,288,310 7.6

*Approximate.
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<th>Dioceses</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Roman Catholics</th>
<th>% of Pop.</th>
<th>Bishops</th>
<th>Priests</th>
<th>Monasteries</th>
<th>Convents</th>
<th>Large* Churches</th>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Thai-binh</td>
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<td>88,652</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>64?</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>323</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>335</strong></td>
<td><strong>628</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,476</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

**FIGURES OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NORTH VIETNAM** as gleaned from Roman Catholic sources, publications and interviews with authorities of the Roman Catholic Church in Vietnam.

Figures are of end 1963

*500 members is the dividing line between small and large churches.

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