



The Introduction and Development of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam: A Historical and Sino-Cultural Analysis

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Abstract

This article reviews the process of introduction and the complete development of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam, with a special emphasis on the impact of Chinese Buddhism. The historical background of Mahāyāna Buddhism's introduction to Vietnam in the early centuries CE up through the medieval period is defined through the examination of archaeological findings, historical documents, and religious literature in this paper. Thus, the aim of the research is to consider the interactions between indigenous religion and culture and received ideas and practices of Buddhism from India and Chinese Vietnamese religious syncretism, distilling the profile of Vietnamese Mahāyāna Buddhism. This work advances the knowledge of the spread of Buddhism in Southeast Asia and the influence of the cross-cultural contacts on religion.

Keywords: Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vietnam, Southeast Asia, Cross-cultural contacts, Historical development, Historical documents, Religious literature, Culture, Received ideas

Introduction

Establishment of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam is an important part of the religious and cultural history of SE Asia. Thank to its Theravada origins and Mahayanist expression through the Bodhisattva path and the concept of universal salvation, Buddhism has been at the forefront of the Vietnamese spiritual and artistic system and organizational framework for almost two centuries. This article will try to trace the historical formation of the Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam and the impact of the Chinese Buddhism in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Vietnam's geographical situation



was at the intersection between India and China, therefore, it was quite possible for the Buddhist philosophies to spread along this route. Nevertheless the processes, including the channels and chronology of its dissemination as well the role of Mahāyāna Buddhism in it will remain an issue of varied discussions among scholars. Thus, this work aims at systematically setting out what is known at present about the origins and developments of the Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam based on the current archaeological data, records, and texts.

Historical Context

In order to understand how Mahāyāna Buddhism was introduced in Vietnam, it is worthy to turn to history's account of the region. Before it was introduced to Buddhism, the religion system of Vietnam includes animism and ancestor worship.¹ The first attested precocious indications of a Vietnamese Buddhism are archaeological materials found from the 2nd century CE in the Red River Delta area.² In the course of this initial phase Vietnam known then as Giao Chí was a Chinese colony as part of the Han Dynasty imperial sphere of southward expansion. This political relation with China was to be very important in defining the religious cultures that were to shaped Vietnam since it helped in bringing in Chinese cultural and religious such as Buddhism.³

The Arrival of Mahāyāna Buddhism

The arrival of Mahāyāna Buddhism to Vietnam has not been precisely defined but it is estimated that Mahāyāna was introduced to Vietnam between 1st and 3rd centuries CE. The initial transmission likely occurred through multiple channels:

1. Brahmanical monks who sailed and merchants who Nbought goods through sea routes
2. Chinese Buddhist missionaries
3. Vietnamese students, pilgrims who return from studies in China and India Historical researches indicate that the early Vietnamese Buddhism might have had some elements of both Theravada and Mahayana schools.⁴ But in the sixth century CE, Mahāyāna style had gained a higher influence mainly because of the Chinese presence.

¹ Taylor, K. W. A history of the Vietnamese

² Miksic, J. N., & Goh, G. Y. Ancient Southeast Asia

³ Whitfield, R., Whitfield, S., & Agnew, N. Cave temples of Mogao: Art and history on the silk road

⁴ Swearer, D. K. The Buddhist world of Southeast Asia



Chinese Influence on Vietnamese Mahāyāna Buddhism

A study of the evolution of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam cannot ignore the contribution of Chinese Buddhism to the process. Several factors contributed to this influence: In fact, due to political control over Vietnam by China (111 BCE - 939 CE), communication of Chinese culture including Buddhism was easily possible in Vietnam.⁵ The Buddhist translation from China to Vietnam uses the Vietnamese translation of scriptures instead of original sanskrit texts. Thus, there emerged the usage of Chinese interpretations and commentaries. The structures of religious institutions in Vietnamese Buddhism were influenced by their Chinese counterparts in terms of manners, rules of monastic disciplines, architectural designs and patterns of administration.⁶ The influence of Chan Buddhism from China beginning of the 6th century CE was the key force that stirred Vietnamese Mahāyāna. Trúc Lâm school, established by Emperor Trần Nhân Tông in the XIII century, can be considered as Trúc Lâm school as most typical Vietnamese interpretation of Chan guidelines.⁷

Thus the Vietnamese did adopt a Mahāyāna Buddhism but this was not a carbon copy of the Chinese religion. Rather it came under syncretism and adaptation integrating some aspects of the earlier indigenous Vietnamese belief system. Such an arrangement led to the development of a brand of Mahāyāna Buddhism that is uniquely Vietnamese.⁸

Key aspects of this syncretic process included:

1. The assimilation of the local gods in and aligning them with the Buddhist cult
2. Some of the changes included modification of ideas concerning Vietnamese ancestor spirits.
3. Formation of schools which are quite specific to Vietnam like the Trúc Lâm.

Specifically the coming of Mahāyāna Buddhism to Vietnam is not simple process that can be easily described by simple terms such as importation and accommodation. Even though the Mahāyāna Buddhism had its origin from China, there was assimilation of the new ideas in Vietnamese culture to bring about a fresh outlooks to Buddhism. As such, this paper underscores

⁵ Yu, X. Buddhism, war, and nationalism: Chinese monks in the struggle against Japanese aggressions, 1931-1945

⁶ Soucy, A. The Buddha side: Gender, power, and Buddhist practice in Vietnam

⁷ Nguyen, C. T. Zen in medieval Vietnam: A study and translation of the Thiên Uyên Tập Anh

⁸ DeVido, E. A. "Buddhism for this world": The Buddhist revival in Vietnam, 1920 to 1951, and its legacy



the role of both context and regional variations in the analysis of the diffusion of religious practices. New investigations into the particular dynamics of the process of cultural exchange and continued development of Buddhism in Vietnam, as well as the activities of the Vietnamese Buddhists themselves, may help answer some more questions in the story of this part of religion history.

The Introduction of Mahāyāna Buddhism to Vietnam

The entry of Mahāyāna Buddhism also took place in an intense interconnectivity of trade and cultural networks relations in Vietnam. It is essential to note that Vietnam during the first several centuries CE was called Giao Chi in the first centuries CE or Giao Châu later, Giao--Châu was located at the crossroads of the maritime and overland trade between China on the one hand, India and the Southeast Asia on the other.⁹ Indeed these trade channels also connected religious ideas besides disseminating wealth, fame and/or the goods such as Buddhists' beliefs. Maritime Silk Road transported Chinese goods to Southeast Asia and from there goods were shipped on The Silk Road from Southeast Asia to regions of Central Asian markets. Vietnamese ports particularly in Red River Delta, were points where merchants and religious pilgrims on their journeys between India and China stopped.¹⁰ By doing this, this geographical location placed Vietnam in the middle of encounter of works which has indian buddhism and chinese cultural imprint. Furthermore, Vietnam's political relationship with China as a protectorate from 111 BCE to 939 CE affected religious developments creative a new religious culture. The long process of Chinese rule resulted in Chinese influences in Vietnamese customs and even language, bureaucracy, and religion. Because of this cultural background, Mahāyāna Buddhism was quickly adopted and taken into China when it was cultivating in some of the regions.¹¹

Role of Chinese Monks and Pilgrims

Chinese monks and supporters of the Mahāyāna played the decisive role in the evolution of Buddhist culture and introduction of the listed version of the teaching in Vietnam. Some examples of the correlations between the Buddhist imperial patronage in China and Buddhist proselytism and travel consist of:

⁹ Hall, K. R. A history of early Southeast Asia: Maritime trade and societal development, 100–1500

¹⁰ Heirman, A., & Bumbacher, S. P. (Eds.). The spread of Buddhism

¹¹ Kiernan, B. Viet Nam: A history from earliest times to the present



Several notable Chinese monks made significant contributions to the establishment of Buddhism in Vietnam:

1. Mou Bo (Mâu Bác): This Chinese layman came to Giao Châu only in the last decade of the second century CE. He is attributed to write “Lý hoặc luận”(intent or treatise on the removal of doubt), seen as one of The earliest religious literature of Buddhism in Vietnam.¹²
2. Kang Senghui (Khuông Tăng Hội): Born to Sogdian parents in Jiaozhi (Northern Vietnam) in the late 2nd century CE, he was an active translator of Buddhist texts into Chinese and also contributed high extents of the expansion of Buddhism in both Vietnam and China.¹³
3. Vinitaruci (Tì-ni-đa-lưu-chi): A Bengali monk who came to Vietnam through China, in 580 AD. He has established the Vinitaruci school which is one of the oldest Zen (Thiền) schools in Vietnam.¹⁴

Such monks and other IT merchants introduced not only Buddhist literature but also Chinese visions and performances of Mahāyāna Buddhism. They founded monastic institutions, translated scriptures and disciple preliminary of the Vietnamese Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Early Buddhist Centers and Monasteries in Vietnam

The founding of the Buddhist constructions and monasteries served as the institutional development of Mahāyāna Buddhism of Vietnam. Archaeological evidence and historical records provide insights into some of the earliest and most significant Buddhist sites:

1. Luy Lâu: Luy Lâu lies in the area of present-day Bắc Ninh Province and was Giao Châu’s capital; it was one of Vietnam’s first Buddhist hubs. Some research information indicates that by the second century AD, Luy Lâu developed as a large scale Buddhist centre with more than twenty stupas and five hundred monks.¹⁵
2. Dâu Pagoda: Located in the territory of the city of Bắc Ninh the Dâu Pagoda is deemed one of the oldest shrines of the Buddhism in Vietnam known to have been constructed in the second century A.D. It served as a vehicle in the early propagation of Buddhism in the Red River Delta area.¹⁶

¹² Nguyen, T. T. The history of Buddhism in Vietnam

¹³ Nguyen, C. T. Zen in medieval Vietnam: A study and translation of the Thiền Uyển Tập Anh

¹⁴ Cuong Tu Nguyen. Zen in Medieval Vietnam: A Study and Translation of the Thiền Uyển Tập Anh

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Miksic, J. N., & Goh, G. Y. (2016). *Ancient Southeast Asia y



3. Phật Tích Pagoda: This is a pagoda, lies in Bắc Ninh Province, of Vietnam, it has its related history with the birth and emergence of the Vinitaruci Zen school. Most of the remnants belong to the Đinh and Pre- Đinh dynasties, and the recently discovered stone Buddha sculpture of the 7th century is one of the best examples of the earliest Buddhist sculptures in Vietnam.¹⁷

4. Long Đọi Sơn: The examples of Buddhist rock carvings and cave temples are located on this mountain in the Hà Nam Province and were active between the 6th and 8th centuries CE.¹⁸

As well as religion and training of Buddhist monastic communities, these early Buddhist centers became significant centres of learning and culture. All of them played an important part in such activities as the translation of Buddhist scriptures and copying of reproductions of them, education of monks and the arrangement of certain forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam. The process of Mahāyāna diffusion in Vietnam was thus a rich process which involved several historical factors and the action of Chinese monks and pilgrims and local institutions. On these premises the peculiar characteristics of Vietnamese Buddhism would develop in the ensuing centuries, imbuing the Indian Buddhist idea with the Chinese tradition and the autochthonous Vietnamese spirit.

The Sinification of Mahāyāna Buddhism

The arrival of Mahāyāna Buddhism into Vietnamese territory was entwined with Chinese cultural penetration in Vietnamese society and hence the term Sinification of Vietnamese Buddhism. It was during this period that severe questions arose related to Mahāyāna Buddhism which influences the formation of Buddhism in Vietnam as a combination of Sanskrit Buddhist influences, Chinese influences and Vietnamese traditional echoes.

Adaptation of Chinese Buddhist Practices and Beliefs

The integration of Chinese Buddhism in Vietnam was a slow process that span through the century. This was made easier by the fact that Vietnam had many years of political subjection and assimilation to Chinese culture.¹⁹

¹⁷ Jessup, H. I., & Zéphir, T. Sculpture of Angkor and ancient Cambodia: Millennium of glory

¹⁸ Schweyer, A. Ancient Vietnam: History, art and archaeology

¹⁹ Taylor, K. W. A history of the Vietnamese



1. Monastic Institutions: Many Vietnamese monasteries were established on the Chinese model, mandate and discipline. They adopted the Chinese Buddhist monastic code (Vinaya) which determine the monasteries' daily activities down to their organizational chart.²⁰
2. Ritual Practices: Incorporated, or adopted many Chinese Buddhist rituals were incorporated into Vietnamese practice. For instance, the instrumentalities used in the ritual ceremonies such as bells, drum and the wooden fish called muyu had similarities with the Chinese.²¹
3. Bodhisattva Worship: Chinese Mahāyāna practices for instance focusing on bodhisattva worship with strong devotion in Avalokiteśvara (Quan Âm in Vietnamese). The Vietnamese deity Quan Âm, like its Chinese counterpart Guanyin, is the feminine representation of this influence.²²
4. Chan (Thiền) Buddhism: This paper investigates how the arrival of Chan Buddhism from China influenced the development of Vietnamese Mahāyāna. Three Chinese derived schools: the Vinitaruci, Vô Ngôn Thông and Thảo Đường contributed uniquely to the Vietnamese Thiền.²³

Influence of Chinese Buddhist Texts and Commentaries

In fact, Vietnamese Buddhists relied most on Chinese Buddhist texts and commentaries as the orientations of studying and practicing Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam.

1. Textual Transmission: Due to historical relations between Vietnam and China it is important to note that majority of the Buddhist scriptures came into Vietnam through Chinese translations and not through Sanskrit. Due to this, the Vietnamese Buddhists were able to understand Buddhist ideas as interpreted through the Chinese for a long time.²⁴
2. Canonical Texts: More specifically, Nguyen mentions that the texts of the Chinese Buddhist canon, such as the Lotus Sutra, the Heart Sutra, the Pure Land sutras became the basis of Vietnamese Buddhists. Many of these texts were then, more or less translated or paraphrased into Vietnamese, but still keeping much of the above Chinese rendering.²⁵

²⁰ ibid

²¹ Soucy, A. The Buddha side: Gender, power, and Buddhist practice in Vietnam

²² Yu, C. F. Kuan-yin: The Chinese transformation of Avalokitesvara

²³ ibid

²⁴ Buswell Jr, R. E., & Lopez Jr, D. S. The Princeton dictionary of Buddhism

²⁵ Thich, N. H. Vietnam: Lotus in a sea of fire



3. Commentarial Tradition: For a long time, Vietnamese monks were able to read Buddhist books through the help of Chinese commentaries. This is true mainly in the works of Chinese masters including Zhiyi of Tiantai school and Fazang of Huayan school.²⁶

4. Literary Style: Classical Chinese (Hán văn) was used in the Buddhist literature in Vietnam until the beginning of the twentieth centuries, this is because of the impact made by the Chinese style of literature among Buddhists.

Syncretism with Indigenous Vietnamese Beliefs and Traditions

However, though much of what was transmitted was Chinese, Vietnamese Buddhism was never a complete carbon copy of Chinese Buddhism. But what actually occurred was syncretism whereby a number of institution elements of indigenous beliefs and practices of Vietnam entered the institution.

1. Ancestor Worship: In Vietnam the tradition of ancestor veneration became part of Buddhism. Prayers at Vietnamese ancestral shrines were incorporated into Buddhist temples and rites for the deceased continued to adopt many local practices borrowed from ancestor worship.²⁷

2. Local Deities: The Indigenized Vietnamese are popular as the gods of Buddhism and many of them were once amalgamated into the religion. For instance, the Đạo Mẫu or the cult of the Mother Goddesses were blended with some sorts of Vietnamese Buddhism.²⁸

3. Trúc Lâm Zen School: Also established in the 13th century by Emperor Tran Nhan Tong, the Truc Lam-yen was influenced more of a Vietnamese interpretation of Chan. Thus it follow Confucianism and Taoism, but, again, reflecting the Vietnamese blend of the two religions.²⁹

4. Nationalist Adaptations: The primordial focus on what was genuinely Vietnamese or distortion of their Chinese influences recurred when Vietnamese Buddhists had a confrontation with Chinese domination. It led to creation of a quite separate Vietnamese Buddhist identity.³⁰

It means therefore that the Sinification of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam was a kind of process of imitation in a broader sense since the Vietnamese borrowed, adapted, and compounded

²⁶ Woodside, A. Vietnam and the Chinese model: A comparative study of Vietnamese and Chinese government in the first half of the nineteenth century

²⁷ Dinh, H. L. Vietnamese Buddhism in the 1950s: The intersections of Buddhist revival and anti-superstition campaigns

²⁸ Ejelstad, K., & Nguyen, T. H. Possessed by the spirits: Mediumship in contemporary Vietnamese communities

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ DeVido, E. A. Buddhism for this world": The Buddhist revival in Vietnam, 1920 to 1951, and its legacy



new systems from the Chinese. On the one hand, it could be said that institutional structure and many practices, as well as textual sources, were initially taken from China to Vietnam; on the other – one should notice the striving of Vietnamese Buddhists to reinterpret what they adopted from the Chinese as well as Vietnamese local beliefs. This led to a form of Mahāyāna Buddhism that, despite Chinese influence, was adapted to derive its own Vietnamese look and feel.

The Development of Vietnamese Buddhist Schools

The establishment of Vietnamese Buddhist schools marks one of the stages of its growth of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam. The process by taking some Centuries witnessed the gradual development of Vietnamese forms of Buddhism and thoughts under the Chinese impact along with Vietnam's own culture.

Emergence of Distinct Vietnamese Buddhist Schools

During the ancient period, there appeared Vietnamese traditions of Buddhism itself increasingly differentiated from the Chinese, containing the components imported to the Vietnamese territory and developed with the help of Vietnameseizations.

1. Thiền (Zen) Schools: The Vietnamese Thiền originate from Chinese Chan Buddhism that transformed into one of the most popular forms of Buddhism in Vietnam. Three major Thiền schools emerged:

a. Vinitaruci School: This was the earliest Thiền school in Vietnam established in the 6th century by the Indian monk Vinitaruci.

b. Vô Ngôn Thông School: Created in the 9th century by Chinese senior Cô Thanh Vô Ngôn Thông, this school focused upon dong transmission from the treatise of the Buddha.

c. Thảo Đường School: This school was established in the in the 11th century and was known to be linked with the Lý dynasty with Thiền mixed with certain occultism.

2. Trúc Lâm School: The Trúc Lâm (Bamboo Grove) school was founded in the 13th century by Emperor Trần Nhân Tông; however, today it can be regarded as the first purely Vietnamese school of Buddhism. It was a merger of Thiền Buddhism with Confucianism and Taoism as a characteristic feature of the Vietnamese religious system.³¹

³¹ Taylor, K. W. A history of the Vietnamese



3. Pure Land Buddhism: As not one branch of Vietnamese Buddhism, the Pure Land (Tịnh Độ tông) school however became rather popular in Vietnam together with practicing Thiền. This was the case because there was a trend in East Asia of merging meditation techniques with devotional aspects.³²

Contributions of Vietnamese Buddhist Thinkers and Practitioners

Over a period of time, many effective Vietnamese Buddhist scholars and practising monks have made their noteworthy contributions that define Buddhism in Vietnam.

1. Khuông Việt (933-1011): An important figure of initial Vietnamese buddhism Khuông Việt which was effectively practicing buddhism in the Đinh and Early Lê dynasties was the official religious master of the royal palace.³³

2. Vạn Hạnh (?-1018): One of the most influential monks of the Lý dynasty, Vạn Hạnh was influential in politics, and acted as the andicator for the “Three Teachings” (Buddha, Confucius, and Laozi).³⁴

3. Trần Nhân Tông (1258-1308): Trần Nhân Tông the founder of the Trúc Lâm school of Vietnamese Zen was not only a monarch but also a bodhisattva. His works established the anti-dualistic essence of the Vietnamese Thiền Buddhism.³⁵

4. Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ (1230-1291): A lay Buddhist master and the teacher of Trần Nhân Tông, Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ was renowned for its eccentric style of meditation and sudden enlightenment approach to practice.³⁶

5. Nguyễn Đăng Thục (1909-1999): A 20th century Buddhist scholar who actively participated for the Buddhist revival movement and helped in trying to give a modern face to the indigenous Buddhism of Vietnam.³⁷

The Role of Buddhism in Vietnamese Society and Culture

³² Soucy, A. The Buddha side: Gender, power, and Buddhist practice in Vietnam

³³ Whitmore, J. K. Vietnam, Ho Quy Ly, and the Ming (1371-1421)

³⁴ Tran, N. T. Embodying the perfect mindfulness: The Trúc Lâm Zen tradition in Vietnam

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Miksic, J. N., & Goh, G. Y. Ancient Southeast Asia



Buddhism has held many-sided significance for Vietnamese peoples and has affected many aspects of their lives excluding the religiosity.

1. Political Influence: In Vietnamese history, Buddhism was always attached to the political power. At some point such as during the Lý and the Trần dynasties Buddhism became favored among the royal household and had a more active participation in the political structure of the nation.³⁸
2. Education and Literacy: Temples and monasteries were also places of learning; people learned there and many became literate so were preserving knowledge. A sizable portion of the previous Vietnamese literary and historical works can be traced to be stored in Buddhist monasteries.³⁹
3. Art and Architecture: Culture: there are also clear cut traces of Buddhism in the Vietnamese art and architecture. The building of pasoadas, making of buddha statues, and formation of the Buddhist painting, painting style traditions have become great contribute to the culture of Vietnam.⁴⁰
4. Social Welfare: It has been previously pointed that Buddhist organizations have always served society in areas such as education, health care as well as elder and orphaned care.⁴¹
5. National Identity: Despite the weakness and suppression of Buddhism in Vietnamese society from the late 1950s until the mid-1980s, it has been an integral part of Vietnamese culture, tradition and personality.

The two-ness in Vietnamese Buddhism is expressed in the integration of the Vietnamese indigenous belief and the received Buddhism desires encompass Vietnamese patterns of cultural admixture[48]. 6. Modern Revival and Adaptation: Vietnamese Buddhism underwent revival in the 20th century with attempts made to re construct and re justify Buddhism to the modern generation. This has seen them expand their ideation with the formation of Engaged Buddhism, which means the practical usage of Buddhadharma in addressing social and political issues.⁴² Vietnamese buddhist schools, achievements of Vietnamese buddhist scholars and the part of Buddhism in the Vietnamese society prove the flexibility of Mahaiana Buddhism in Vietnam. It

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Woodside, A. Vietnam and the Chinese model: A comparative study of Vietnamese and Chinese government in the first half of the nineteenth century

⁴⁰ Jessup, H. I., & Zéphir, T. Sculpture of Angkor and ancient Cambodia: Millennium of glory

⁴¹ Thich, N. H. Vietnam: Lotus in a sea of fire

⁴² King, S. B. Thich Nhat Hanh and the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam: Nondualism in action



was that, while obviously based partly on Chinese examples, Vietnamese Buddhism developed into a phenomenon thoroughly rooted in Vietnamese culture and history.

Inclusion

In conclusion, this study on the Sinification of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam shows the diversification, assimilation and accommodation process that influence the Buddhism reestablishment in Vietnam. The formation and evolution of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam were deposited indissolubly linked with the Chinese impact, so Vietnamese Mahāyāna Buddhism retained simultaneously both the Indian provenance and the Chinese missions. The paper also shows that the process of Sinification of Vietnamese Buddhism was not the result of imperialism and imposition of an intact Chinese culture onto Vietnam but a creative process of evolution of culture.

In practice, Vietnamese Buddhism relied on the Chinese Buddhist texts, practices and institutional models as a starting material, but Vietnamese Buddhism actively adapted these raw materials according to local conditions. From the process of localization, a couple of specific Vietnamese schools of Buddhism the Trúc Lâm and Thiền were developed and implemented Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism intertwined with the localized Vietnamese spirits and the Vietnamese philosophy. Some of these innovations of the Sinification process are still visible in Vietnamese Buddhism till date. In religious terms such as Chinese-derived religious terms that are used when addressing the gods and frequently appearing in religious text, the architecture of temple and the setting of regionally based monastic communities, the Chinese influence still prevails.

But as it has been said time and time again, it is imperative not to confuse the Vietnamese Buddhism as a replica of Chinese Buddhism. Rather, Hanoi embody a historical, cultural and spiritual complex that is the heritage of the Vietnamese nation. This research thus emphasises the need to consider religious development in the larger historical-developmental frameworks. The observation of Vietnamese Buddhism shows that religious systems become formed with the help of cross-cultural exchange, political factors and localizing. It destabilizes the concept of cultural borrowing and the imposition of foreign religious ideas paying attention to local actors in the process of reception.

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