

Vietnam Bulletin



A typical field trip by the President of the Republic

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political & military news

Existing Peace Results From ARVN Untiring Efforts: Pres. Thieu

SAIGON, December 2 (VP)--"The existing peace in Vietnam is the result of tireless efforts of the RVN Armed Forces in eliminating the enemy inside and outside the national territory."

President Nguyen Van Thieu made this statement at a ceremony awarding ARVN meritorious combatants of the U Minh campaign held Wednesday morning at the RVN 1st Infantry Division Command Headquarters in Ca Mau.

Concerning the military operations, President Thieu said: "such border-crossing operations as Lam Son 719, 720, Toan Thang 1-71, and the recently terminated U Minh campaign testified to the ARVN's untiring efforts to eliminate the enemy from Ca Mau to Ben Hai and thus practically restore peace to the country."

The Chief Executive stressed that following the U Minh campaign, the RVN

Armed Forces will continue to annihilate the remaining enemy bases in U Minh Ha and Ca Mau with a view to restore peace in these swampy areas.

The Chief Executive said even though we are peace-loving people we must defeat the Communists and oppose a Communist-styled neutrality, since thus far Red China, Communist North Vietnam, and their henchmen in the South have shown no sign of goodwill.

President Thieu will try his best, he said, to consolidate the existing peace during his new term of office.

Finally, the Chief Executive appealed to the entire nation and combatants to not be swayed by rumors, but to be confident in the real strength of the country.

RVN Foreign Ministry on SEA Neutralization

SAIGON, November 30 (VP)-- the Foreign Ministry Monday issued a communique which read in full as follows:

"Contrary to what has been reported by some news agencies, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam has not made any decision regarding the neutralization of South-east Asia as proposed by the foreign ministers of the five ASEAN countries.

The Kuala Lumpur declaration of November 27, 1971, was but an accord over the principles agreed upon by the five participating countries."

(The Kuala Lumpur declaration of November 27, 1971 simply states that the five members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines) are "determined to exert initially necessary efforts to secure recognition of and, respect for Southeast Asia as a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality free from any form or manner of interference by outside powers.")

Formation of LH Blocs

SAIGON, November 21 (VP)-- The Lower House, at its plenary session Monday morning, approved with a 66-37 vote the 25 Representative quorum for the formation of a Lower House Bloc.

The quorum issue for this purpose had created a hot debate at the session.

Article 76 of the Lower House draft by-law stipulates that the Representatives are free to join or not join any bloc in the House in accordance with their own political tendencies. However, the article states that Representatives are authorized to join only one bloc as defined in Article 78.

The Lower House has endorsed 99 articles of the draft by-law, fixing the duty and operating procedures for its permanent committees.

The office of each permanent office will include a chairman, a vice chairman, a secretary and one or two reporters as defined in Article 60.

At the same session, while debating Chapter V of its draft by-law on the procedure of its activities, the Lower House accepted the formula of a presidium which will include a chairman, two vice chairmen, and all the Committee Chairmen and Lower House bloc chiefs as its members.

The presidium has the duties of fixing the agenda, confirming the competence of the Committees, determining the emergency nature of the cases involved, setting up the inter-Committees and fixing the duration of the debates at the plenary sessions.

The Monday morning session chaired by Dean Nguyen Ba Luong ended early in the afternoon with 40 more articles endorsed.

1972 World Peace Day

SAIGON, November 28 (VP)-- The Catholic Church will launch the 1972 World Peace Day in the Saigon diocese Sunday, December 12, and a prayer service for world peace will be officiated at the Saigon Basilica on December 31.

At a meeting held Friday afternoon, the Saigon Diocese's inter-Committee decided to call for the cooperation of the Catholic Chaplains Directorate and the Catholic Action Association's Executive Board to urge various parishes throughout the country to hold similar prayer services implementing the theme of the 1972 World Peace Day of Pope Paul VI: "To achieve Peace, let's work for Justice".

World Peace Day, initiated by Pope Paul VI a few years ago, is observed on the first day of the Solar New Year.

The theme of the 1971 World Peace Day was "All men are brothers".

APU Council Meeting in Phnom Penh

SAIGON, November 16 (VP)-- The Asian Parliamentarians Union (APU), Khmer Chapter, opened the APU's 11th Council meeting in Phnom Penh, the capital of the Khmer Republic, on Tuesday.

On this occasion, Vietnamese Senator Nguyen Huy Chieu in his capacity as chairman of the APU's 10th Council meeting praised the APU Khmer Chapter for its efforts and successful organization of the APU's 11th Council meeting despite the war situation in Cambodia.

Senator Chieu laid stress upon the fact that the successful organization of the APU's 11th Council meeting in Phnom Penh was proof of the progress and political stabilization the Khmer Republic has achieved after just a year of membership in the APU.

The APU's 11th Council meeting helped to pave the way for the organization of the APU's 7th General Assembly to open in the Khmer capital today.

VN Art Exhibit in Stockholm

SAIGON, November 18 (VP)-- The Vietnam Information and Arts Center in Stockholm held an exhibit Monday of Vietnamese art in the Swedish capital, diplomatic sources said.

On display were 100 works of well-known Vietnamese photographers.

At the opening of the exhibit, Mr. Tran Nha, Director of the Vietnam Information and Arts Center held a reception with over 100 guests in attendance, among them well-known personalities of the Swedish cultural circle, Swedish senators and members of the diplomatic corps.

"The exhibit aims at presenting Vietnam's scenery and Vietnamese life to the Swedish people," Nha said.

The exhibit attracted much interest and visitors expressed their admiration of the Vietnamese photographers' works.

In addition, Vietnamese handicrafts were on display in a separate room, which also drew the visitor's attention, the sources added.

After Stockholm, the exhibit will be held in other large cities in Sweden, wherein North Vietnam has conducted propaganda activities for the past several years.

319 Reds Rally In Week

SAIGON, November 23 (VP)-- Open Arms Services throughout the country last week welcomed 319 Communist cadres who rallied to the national cause.

The returnees included 150 military cadres, 120 political agents and 49 other elements. The IV Military Region topped the list with 255.

From early this year to date 19,233 Communist cadres have rallied to the national cause, thus bringing to 192,297 the total number of returnees since the promulgation of the Open Arms policy in January, 1963.

RVN RELEASED POWs

POW Issue

SAIGON, November 3 (VP)-- The National Association of Families of U.S. POWs and Missings in South East Asia late last week expressed its belief that the Communists will also release a number of Vietnamese and U.S. POWs equivalent to some 3,000 Communist POWs recently released by the RVN government on the occasion of the RVN President's inauguration, diplomatic sources said.

In a cable sent to the Embassy of Vietnam in Washington, Mrs. Evelyn Grubb, coordinator of the Association, praised President Thieu and all the Vietnamese participating in the release of the Communist prisoners--the largest number of POWs ever released in the Vietnam war.

Japan Helps Build Orphan Center

SAIGON, November 27 (VP)-- The government of Japan will construct for the Republic of Vietnam a Vocational Training Center for Vietnamese Orphans in Bien Hoa, according to diplomatic sources here.

The project was put into effect Saturday morning when Foreign Affairs Minister Lam and Ambassador to Saigon Fumuhiko were the cosigners of an agreement involving the Japanese noble assistance.

The Center, to be built at Tam Hiep, Bien Hoa, occupies an area of about 40 hectares. The construction cost for the first phase of the undertaking is estimated at 220 million yen.

The project was initiated a few years ago by Mr. Takechiyo Matsuda, former Japanese Education Minister and Diet member with the support of over 300 Japanese lawmakers who monthly contributed their own money to the project.

When completed the center will accommodate some 400 orphans between the ages of 11 and 15, for a four-year curriculum including two years of specialization.

economic news

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Economic Agreement with Khmer Republic Ratified

SAIGON, November 18 (VP)-- The Senate at its plenary session Thursday morning endorsed with a 31-2 vote the bill ratifying five agreements on economic cooperation between the Republic of Vietnam and the Republic of Khmer.

The five agreements signed last January 22 between the two governments are related to the border regime, tourism development, road transportation, post office and telecommunication, and navigation over the Mekong River.

As a result of these agreements, two communication axes to be restored will be Axe No. 1 from Saigon-Go Dau Ha to Sway Rieng Neak-Leung-Phnom Penh, and vice-versa and Axe No. 2 from Phnom Penh-Takeo to Tinh Bien-Chau Doc-Long Xuyen, Saigon and vice-versa.

As to the agreement on navigation over the Mekong River, all boats of the two countries are authorized to circulate only on the main water-ways of the Mekong and the Bassac Rivers, not over their junctions in South Vietnam.

The two signatory countries also agreed to set forth the common protective and control measures for the navigation over the Mekong River, especially to fix the monthly flow of boats authorized to navigate over the Mekong River with the escort of warships.

Besides, the regime for navigation of war vessels and merchant ships for military use will be fixed by the military authorities involved.

All these reached agreements are effective for a one-year period since the time of their ratification by the National Assembly of each signatory country.

The Thursday session was chaired by Senate Chairman Nguyen Van Huyen with 33 Senators in attendance.

Senate Committees Hearing on Economic Reform

SAIGON, November 19 (VP)-- Ministers of Economy and Finance Pham Kim Ngoc and Ha Xuan Trung Friday morning testified before the Senate Economy and Finance-Budget Inter-Committee on the promulgation of the new economic and financial measures.

In their testimonies, the two Ministers said the refixing of the U.S. dollar exchange rate will help the national budget get an additional VN \$34 billion receipt per year for the payment of civil servants' salary.

Economy Minister Ngoc made known that during his tour of the United States and meeting with American officials some three months ago, he acknowledged the instability in the U.S. aid policy to Vietnam because the United States itself was faced with financial difficulties, typically the devaluation of the U.S. dollar on the international market.

Therefore, Minister Ngoc stressed, the Administration deemed it necessary to put into effect the new economic reform package in an effort to cope with an eventual reduction of the U.S. aid to Vietnam.

Thanks to the newly-promulgated economic and financial measures, the Republic of Vietnam will not depend too much on foreign aid in the future, Minister Ngoc said.

* * *

INVESTMENT

Influx of European Investors

A team of Vietnamese industrialists and businessmen led by Pham Minh Duong, Vice Minister of Economy in Charge of Industry, attended the second Conference of U.N.I.D.O. (United Nations Industrial Development Organization) in Singapore from November 3 to November 11, 1971.

The UNIDO Conference is intended as a forum for businessmen from developing countries to meet and discuss with prospective foreign investors.

Six specific projects have been presented by the South Vietnamese delegation, and reportedly more than a dozen foreign investors, mostly European, have made firm commitments to set up joint ventures in the Republic of Vietnam.

Oil Prospecting

SAIGON, November 18 (VN)-- The National Petroleum Board (NPB) has received applications from 22 firms, 15 of which are American. The others include Japanese, French, British, and Israeli. The names of the firms are being kept secret at their own request.

Originally some 40 firms had registered with the NPB to obtain application forms, but a member of the Board was quoted to say that many have adopted a wait-and-see attitude "because of the current dispute between Cambodia and South Vietnam over the sovereignty of some off-shore areas." The same source revealed that the two countries are working toward an agreement on the exploitation of oil found under the Viet-Khmer continental shelf. This agreement is likely to be reached before the Minister of Economy issues its "model contract" to prospective firms.

While no deadline has been set for the preliminary screening based on the application forms, companies eligible to bid for prospecting rights are expected to make a firm offer within 45 days after notification by the NPB.

According to reports in the local press, geophysical studies indicate that a large layer of sedimentary rock, which often covers oil pockets, extends from Phan Thiet on the center coastline to Ca Mau on the southern tip of Vietnam, and runs from Tay Ninh near the Cambodian border along the Mekong delta and under the Pacific Ocean to Malaysia.

U.S., Japan Main Suppliers to RVN

SAIGON, December 2 (VP)-- According to Statistics of the Saigon Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the United States and Japan head the list of suppliers of equipment and raw materials for the Republic of Vietnam.

The statistics also revealed that there are 22 countries from all over the world which supply Vietnam with equipment and raw materials. These suppliers include Great Britain, India, Belgium, Portugal, Brazil, the Republic of China, the Federal Republic of Germany, Denmark, Holland, Hong Kong, the United States, Japan, France, the Philippines, Finland, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, Australia, and Italy.

U.S. Sector in RVN

The U.S. sector in South Vietnam, both military and civilian, public and private, totaled 117,782 Vietnamese workers as of June this year. The figure has dropped 6.8 percent compared to December of 1970. The latest labor statistics from the Ministry of Labor show that the reduction has occurred mostly in U.S. military and civilian government agencies, not private contracting firms.

The total number of U.S. citizens employed by contracting firms is 10,668 compared to 13,034 in 1969. There has been a reduction in the number of third-country nationals (South Korean, Filipinos, etc.) working for U.S. institutions in Vietnam. There are now about 8,700 third-country nationals as compared to 10,700 at the end of 1970.

Land Distribution

SAIGON, November 19 (VP)-- The Government has secured one million hectares of land available for distribution to 800,000 peasants as planned in the "Land to the Tiller" program, sources from the General Directorate of Land reported.

The sources said, as of November, 1971, a total of 49,435 landowners throughout the country have completed declaration of an area of 786,484 hectares of their land to be expropriated by the government in line with the "Land to the Tiller" law.

In addition, the availability of 200,000 hectares of public land enables the government to have at its disposal one million hectares of land to be distributed to 800,000 peasants within the framework of the "Land to the Tiller" program.

The same sources added that Land Services all over the country received 418,919 applications for land distribution from peasants concerning 529,953 hectares of land. Of the applications 381,104 have been approved covering 486,478 hectares.

From March 1, 1971 to date, 276,107 more hectares of land were allocated to peasants which are now being cultivated, the sources said, adding that at this rate, the goal of distributing 400,000 hectares of cultivated land to the peasants in 1971 will surely be reached.

In 1970, a total of 162,342 peasants were to be made landowners of a 210,371 hectares area thanks to the "Land to the Tiller" program, the sources disclosed.

POPULATION GROWTH

IN

SOUTH VIET-NAM

Although experts may differ on the rate of population growth in Viet-Nam, it has been the practice to use a factor of 2.6 per cent per year compared with 1.0 in U.S.A., 0.7 in Italy, 0.6 in England, 2.5 in India, 3.3 in Thailand, 3.4 in Mexico and 3.5 in Philippines.

At this rate, the population of South Viet-Nam will have doubled within 25 years. Even if we are optimistic and forecast a slowly declining rate (perhaps to 2.4 per cent), by the year 2000 the population of South Viet-Nam will reach 37,000,000 people, or a little over 2 times the present estimated population.

(Extract from a document written by Mr. Tran-Van Nhieu, Secretary General at the Ministry of Public Health.)

Vietnamese Labor Leader Stresses Politics, Ideology in War Effort *

From an FLF interview with Mr. Tran Quoc Buu, President of the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor (CVT), September, 1971. Mr. Buu has pioneered the effort to organize the Vietnamese labor force, facing persecution both from the government (during the early 1960's) and from the Viet Cong, who have sought to assassinate him on several occasions. (Translator: Nguyen Van Thang, Assistant to Mr. Buu)

Do you feel that the presidential election was fair, even though there was only one candidate?

I regret that there was only one candidate in the last presidential election. But I feel that the government was not responsible for that situation. General Minh had been accepted as a registered presidential candidate but withdrew. Vice-President Ky had been declared as a presidential candidate, but he also withdrew. President Thieu decided to go ahead with the election because the proceedings conformed to the election law, and it is dangerous to have a political vacuum in a crisis situation. Because of these two reasons I have expressed support of the Presidential election.

Had the people been sufficiently informed on how to vote?

We think that in general the people had been informed about the possibility about using the vote bulletins (ballots) to indicate support or rejection of President Thieu. Television and radio stations broadcast the information throughout the country. We checked with the people in the provinces, and we have proof that the people know how to indicate non-support—by not putting the bulletin in the envelope.

I'm sure that you are familiar with the debate in the United States concerning gradual or immediate withdrawal from Vietnam. Could you please give us your opinions on the subject?

I have always supported the policy of phasing American withdrawal with the increased ability of the Vietnamese forces to support the war. But the transfer of responsibility to the Vietnamese government and Vietnamese forces should be done in such a way that would not cause the collapse of the Vietnamese forces. A collapse would mean the waste of all American assistance, both in material and in human lives. The Vietnamese people would accuse the United States of irresponsibility in creating such a situation.

Do you feel that President Nixon's trip to Peking will affect the Vietnamese situation?

Certainly, President Nixon's planned visit will have some effect in Vietnam. There is great psychological impact when an anti-China, anti-Communist nation such as the United States changes its position. But I cannot say what real effect the trip will have on South Vietnam. Dialogue with Red China is good if a country is politically mature. Unfortunately, in Vietnam the political situation is weak. There is no unity among anti-Communist forces. Although the Communist terrorists plant mines which blow up buses and kill their occupants, the Vietnamese people cannot mount an opposition. What you witnessed today, the CVT general strike in protest against the Communist attack of September 21, is the first time the Vietnamese people have organized. Usually people accepted the killings as faits accomplis.

In May, 1964 I was in Washington when the Johnson Administration was considering massive military involvement in South Vietnam. I had the privilege of meeting President Johnson and his assistants. I explained that it is equally important to create strong political organizations in South Vietnam as it is to provide military aid. The Communists consider war an extension of politics, and they use war to achieve political ends. They think of everything in terms of politics. You all know that on the military front we have always been winning but on the political front we can still lose the battle. In South Vietnam the press writes in a pro-Communist way because they are afraid that they could not sell their papers if they took an anti-Communist stand. The anti-Communist political parties are not strong enough. Vietnamization should not be confined to military assistance, but also to build up strong anti-Communist political parties.

Do you feel the Americans can improve the Vietnamese political situation?

The ability of the United States to help build a viable political system in South Vietnam is evident, especially if we consider what Communist countries are doing in the North. In the course of the war Russia and China have sent all types of aid to North Vietnam. They succeeded in building a strong political regime—so strong that the North can afford to bring the war not only to the South, but to Cambodia and Laos. In South Vietnam the United States brought in mainly combat troops; on the political front they have done very little.

Much of the problem seems to be a lack of understanding of Vietnamese culture, especially the traditional village structures. What kind of assistance should we give in order to fit the needs of Vietnam?

Of course South Vietnamese tradition and culture are quite different from the tradition of the United States. We know the Americans are aware of the differences and willing to study our culture. Many know it well. But Americans have the wrong attitude about commitment in South Vietnam. We fight an ideological war where the front line is nowhere and everywhere. The Americans send combat troops. They think the front line is in the jungle. But the front line is in the churches, schools, pagodas, everywhere. The main reason for failure is that the Communist's main front is political. Our way of dealing with that type of war is unrealistic and unadaptable.

What is the CVT program for exposing the true picture of Communism in South Vietnam?

We have an education program. Since the CVT was created, we have been especially concerned about educational problems. We teach courses in the Saigon area and also on the provincial and district levels. But we suffer from very limited means. There is not enough possibility to carry out our education program, especially when compared with the Communist effort.

The people have always been suspicious of government information service. Maybe because of a lack of respect for the government, people don't believe government sources. In our organization we can tell people what communism is. People believe us and organize anti-Communist demonstrations. The government cannot achieve this effect. We still have a long way to go to compete with the extremely efficient Communist propaganda program.

How do the Communists alienate the people from the government?

In general, the Communists use psychology. They exploit people's frustrations. In any country there are problems with the prison system and tax-collection, for example. The Communists succeed in persuading the people that the government is to blame for these problems.

How can you win the allegiance of the people?

The best way is to create a large number of well-trained militants to explain to people the evils of communism. These cadres would go to the countryside—the provinces and the hamlets. Today, the Revolutionary Development cadres fill that role. Cadres from local villages come to Saigon to get information to bring back to local villages.

Is there any chance of a negotiated peace with the Communists, or must they be totally defeated on the battlefield, like in Malaya?

From a long and personal experience with the Communists, I know that they always retain their policy of world domination, and they use negotiations to achieve this goal. They continually attempt to subvert countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. If we in South Vietnam engage in negotiations, we should link these talks with our war effort. The Communists are never reliable unless forced to be.

* From "The Rising Tide," A bulletin of Information and opinion of the Freedom Leadership Foundation, Inc, Vol I, No. 14, Nov.29, 1971.

History of VN Buddhism

Introduced from India by sea, China by land

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 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.D., 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. 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. Popular Buddhism with lay-adherents did not establish itself until later. 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." The Chinese dynasty of Sui 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 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 Tuy 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.

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 states that the Ly dynasty gained their ascension 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.



Central image at Xa Loi pagoda in Saigon is this Buddha.

The later years of Thanh Ton's reign like the rule of Le Nhan Tong 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. 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 (Quoc-su) and served as Imperial Counselor.

As Buddhism increased its number among the Vietnamese laity, it also gained the appearance of a bureaucracy. In 1169 the Emperor Le Anh Ton (1138-1175) established a school (**Thi Tam Giao**) for the study of the three religions, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. The same ruler gave recognition as the official state religion to Buddhism, and granted it high privileges.

The Buddhist clergy were placed under the 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. 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 such involved in Vietnamese politics during those 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, Le Thai 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.

Mixed Doctrines

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 has 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 Bodhisattavas 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



No comprehensive understanding of the Vietnamese can be gained without an awareness of Buddhism's influence.

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 bygone 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, 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 19th century took effect. 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.

Pagodas, writings destroyed after invasion

The Chinese invasion of 1414 also brought many Confucian writings. During their short stay, the invading Chinese ordered the destruction of many pagodas and the confiscation of Buddhist sacred writings. When the Vietnamese regained their independence 14 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.

Led Uprisings

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 alchemist elements. It is recorded that from time to time the Taoist or Buddhist monks would lead peasant uprisings against the government.

Jean Chesneaux writes in *Contribution à l'Histoire de la Nation Vietnamienne*: "Faced with official Confucianism, guardian of the established order, doctrine of the feudatories and mandarins, these two religions, Buddhism and Taoism, in their most popular context served as a vehicle for social discontent."

Chesneaux says that in 1442, the monk Than 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. 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 followers to have shaven heads and wear black clothing. Even though such events did not basically cause any extended changes, they are



At seaside resort of Vung Tau this Buddha dominates hilltop scene.

indicative of the political and military involvement of Buddhist leaders. Understanding these factors aid to evaluate the current religio-political-military struggles in Vietnam.

During the civil war of the 16th 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. Thus used as a political strategy, Buddhism began a limited recovery.

The rigidity of Confucianism tended to reduce scholastic train-

ing to rhetorical exercises and philosophical speculation so that new schools of Buddhism coming from China were almost eagerly accepted by the courts. 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. So effective were some of these schools that the Empress Dieu Vien (Trinh Thi Ngoc Hanh), wife of Le Than Ton

Trinh dynasty restored, built many temples

(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 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 Thang Long in the north.

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. 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.

Nguyen Family

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. 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 Buddha was given offerings for favors granted and worshipped as a God.

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 genii...", 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.

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. 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.

Studies Group

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 1948 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 by a new Association for 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 Geneva Agreement divided the country. The General Buddhist Association of Vietnam was formed in 1956, composed of three monk committees 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 16 members of the United Buddhist Association, the five significant ones are:

(1) Ethnic Cambodian Theravadists: primarily found in the 10 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) totalling less than 75 years, it is believed that these Theravadists 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 the office. Being generally non-political, it has been largely ignored by the government until now.

(2) Ethnic Vietnamese Theravada: A very small group with perhaps 50 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 Da Nang.

(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 trivial 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.



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