

# THE ORIGIN OF THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM IN VIETNAM

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Introduction: Vietnam is now a predominantly Mahāyāna Buddhist country but with some influences from Theravāda Buddhism. There are two Theravāda groups in Vietnam, namely Khmer Theravāda Buddhism (KTB) and Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism (VTB). Both of them study and practice the Pāli-Tipitaka. They are commonly called Theravada Buddhism in Vietnam (TBV)

KTB has been practiced since the 3rd B.C during King Asoka's period. It has since undergone several changes in the Mekong Delta under the Nguyen Court. They harshly forced the Khmer population to abandon the Theravada tradition. It included forcing the Theravāda monks to become Mahāyāna monks. However, they love the Theravāda Buddhism as if it were their own blood and bones. The Khmer temples secretly organized Dhamma classes for monks, although facing serious difficulties. As a result, KTB gradually developed in Vietnam, the Dhamma classes were allowed by the Vietnamese government many years ago; even a Khmer Theravāda Academy for Buddhist Studies was established in 2005.

For Vietnamese people, the first opportunity when Vietnamese monks, who were ordained according to the Theravāda tradition in Cambodia, led by the Ven. Ho Tong (Vamsarakkhita), together with the Cambodian Sangharāja, the Ven. Chuon Nath (Jotaññāno) and 30 Cambodian Bhikkhus, came to Vietnam to establish the Sīma for the first Vietnamese Theravāda temple in 1939. Since that time, the Vietnamese people have gradually believed in Theravāda Buddhism. Besides this, there was a significant contribution by Ven. Narada from Sri Lanka in 1930. He came to Vietnam and planted young Bodhi trees brought from Sri Lanka in many places around the country. During his subsequent visits in the 1950s and 1960s, he attracted large numbers of Buddhists to the Theravāda tradition.

There are now 529 Theravāda temples and 8,919 Theravāda monks in total throughout Vietnam. This clearly proves a large presence of the Theravāda Buddhist sect has been established in a country, which is predominantly of the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition.

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