

The Challenges of Buddhism in Vietnam and its unification during the 20th century

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The late 19th and 20th centuries marked a period when Vietnamese Buddhism recovered from the terrible oppression under Ming Dynasty, French colonialism, and the Diem regime. Ming rulers confiscated most Buddhist texts in Dai Viet and brought them to China; they destroyed numerous pagodas, exiled numerous talented monks to China, implemented a policy to assimilate Vietnamese into Chinese, and spread Confucianism as the dominant religion, strictly controlling the practices of Buddhism and Taoism. During the period of French colonialism, many Buddhist temples were confiscated and converted to Catholic churches, and Buddhist religious activities were prohibited. The oppression of Buddhists continued in southern Vietnam under President Diem's regime, when Buddhism was destroyed and was replaced by Catholicism as the national religion. Despite such calamities, Vietnamese Buddhists struggled to maintain Buddhist revival movements, and celebrated Vesak puja, the first Buddhist ceremony of Vietnam in the early twentieth century. In 1951, Vietnamese Buddhists joined the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) founded in Colombo. At the same time, three Buddhist sects were founded in the south – Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism and Hoahao Buddhism in 1939, and Khatsi Buddhism in 1946. The self-immolation of Ven. Thich Quang Ducin 1963 in a protest against the Diem regime destroying Buddhism marked a turning point for Vietnamese Buddhism during a period of complex politics in southern Vietnam, when all the Buddhist sects banded together and rose up against the destruction of Buddhism. Eventually, Vietnam was united and remained so after achieving victory against foreign rule. The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha was formally established in 1981, while all the Buddhist sects including Vietnamese, Khmers and other people in Vietnam were unified in their Buddhist programs, striving for national co-operation and harmony among the sects with each sect observing its own traditions.

Keywords: Vietnamese Buddhism, Confucianism, Catholicism, Restoration, Unification