



## **Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition of Viet Nam**

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In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the revival of Buddhism in the World emerged strongly and spread widely to many Buddhist countries. At the same time, Vietnamese Buddhism was also restored by a number of the Buddhist revival movements in *Mahāyāna* and *Theravāda*. Apart from that, a newly Buddhist tradition was founded in South Vietnam called the Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition, one of nine organizations in the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha.

### **❖ What is Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition?**

Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition was established by Master Minh Đăng Quang in 1944. The name of this tradition brings many symbolic meanings and describes a part of the virtuous conduct of an ordained practitioner. The word “*Khất Sĩ*” means “mendicant” or “beggar.” Commonly, mendicants wander from place to place to beg the mercy of the passers to survive. Most of the mendicants, who are poor or unfortunate, cannot work or make the material world. So, a mendicant need to beg for food or money from others for their alive.

In the sense of religion, Khất Sĩ is to say about the practical quality of a bhikkhu. Bhikkhu (比丘) means “beggar” or “one who lives by alms.” The historical Buddha, Prince Siddhartha, having abandoned a life of pleasure and status, lived as an alms mendicant in his śramaṇa lifestyle. Those of his more serious students who renounced their lives as householders and came to study full-time under his supervision also adopted this lifestyle. These full-time student members of the Sangha became a community of ordained monastics who wandered from town to city throughout the year, living off alms and stopping in one place only for the Vassa, the rainy months of the monsoon season.

According to the Diamond Sutra, “bhikkhu” is translated into three means.

Bồ ma (怖魔): Due to the diligent practice of eliminating evil.

Khất sĩ (乞士): live by begging for alms.

Tịnh giới (淨戒): pure precepts.

Thus, A bhikshu practices the middle path, practices begging for alms, and destroys evil that arises from the three karmas of body, speech, and mind. To practice the effort of ten perfections, on the one hand, a bhikkhu has to beg the material things for nursing the body. All foods and drinks devotees offer to a bhikkhu will be used as a main meal in the day. Due to the almsgiving, a bhikkhu has a good healthy existence. On the other hand, a bhikkhu also begs to learn all Dharmas in the world for spiritual life. Thus, begging is not a mean action. It is a natural law in life. A person called a perfected person begs to learn all things, even the tiny things. Similarly, to have good knowledge and quality, a bhikkhu must be patient and learn all the dharma. The more profound sense of the begging teaches the ordained practitioners to be an effort and overcome difficulties in situations. For the way of liberation and enlightenment can't attain overnight. From that, one can understand that the word Khát Sī consists of two actions: Begging for the materials for the body and all Dharmas for the spiritual life. That's why the master Minh Đăng Quang named the Khát Sī Buddhist tradition as a symbolic beauty for a practical quality of a bhikkhu.

The image of a lotus and a bright light is the logo of the Khát Sī Buddhist Tradition. According to the ideal of the master Minh Đăng Quang, a lotus deals with the symbol of purity and perfection of the three Buddha periods. It grows out of the mud but is not defiled, just like Buddha, born into the world but lives above the earth. A bright light symbol that brings the light of Buddha's *Dharma* to all creature beings. All these symbols are the spirit of *transmitting Shakyamuni right Dharma* of Master Minh Đăng Quang. Additionally, the light of dharma will dispel the darkness of ignorance of beings so that the beings are enlightened and attain a happy life in this life and the next. This logo is an invaluable heritage that the monks and nuns in the lineage inherited, maintained, and developed for the noble purpose of preaching Buddhism in general and the Khát Sī Buddhist tradition in particular.

#### ❖ **The brief biography of Master Minh Đăng Quang**

Master Minh Đăng Quang, the secular name is Nguyễn Thành Đạt, was born on September 26, 1923, in Phú Hậu village, Tam Bình district, Vĩnh Long Province. He is the last child in the fifth of the family. His father is Nguyễn Tồn Hiếu. His mother is Phạm Thị Ty (Nhàn). When he reached ten months, his mother got sick and passed away. Then, He was looked after by stepmother Hà Thị Song who brought him up young.

At the age of fifteen (1938), he went to Nam Vang (now Cambodia) to study the path under the guidance of Master Lục Tà Keo. After three years of studying, he was dissatisfied with what his master taught. Therefore, he left his master and returned to his homeland. He married Kim Huê, a daughter of the district chief, and had a baby girl named Kim Liên. Soon, his wife and his daughter died.

In 1943, he renounced his worldly life to go to Seven Mountains for the cultivated retreat. During this time, he tried to practice and research the holy doctrines of two Buddhist branches: *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna*. In 1944, he decided to go to Mũi Nai- Hà Tiên, so he went abroad to search for the Path again. Due to the missing boat, he meditated deeply on the mountaintop for seven days and nights. Finally, he attained enlightenment while looking out ecstatically over the far-away gushes of waves on the surface of the unrest ocean. One year later, he started receiving householders as his disciples. As he overtly declared, he has undertaken the career of “Transmitting the *Shakyamuni Right Dharma- Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition of Viet Nam.*”

On the first of February 1954, on the way from Sa Đéc to Cần Thơ, An armed group from the provincial controlling power took him and his entourage away. Those who had been arrested were all released later, except the master. Since then, no hearsay about his whereabouts has been reliable or validated.

#### ❖ **The beginning period of the Khất Sĩ Buddhist tradition (1944- 1954)**

Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition starts working on religion as a new Buddhist order under Master Minh Đăng Quang’s guidance. Its significant activities practice the *Four requisites of Ascetic practitioners in the Middle Way* and emphasis that “*practitioners of the Dharma should practice how to live among the Saṅgha.*” Therefore, several people followed him and were admitted into the Order and became monks and nuns as his Buddhist disciples. Some became devout Buddhists who took refuge in the Triple Gem and observed five precepts. In addition, to having a place for the practitioners to cultivate, more than twenty monasteries were established. It is clear that under Master Minh Đăng Quang’s time, Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition collects four Buddhist practitioners, including monks, nuns, men, and women. For nearly ten years, the Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition attracted most of the southern people in Viet Nam. Mainly, it spreads widely and quickly to the provinces in the Mekong Delta River.

In particular, the sixty-nine “The Truth” books are compiled by Master Minh Đăng Quang during this beginning period. Whole books are not only the combination of ideologies and practices of *Theravāda* (Buddhist Southern School) and *Mahāyāna* (Buddhist Northern School) but also the excellent and valuable teachings of himself to the next Buddhist generation.

#### ❖ **The period of the founding of the congregation (1954- 1975)**

After the disappearance of the patriarch Minh Đăng Quang on 1st February 1954, the disciples continued to uphold his career by wandering over Viet Nam to preach Buddhism. From 1954 to 1964, the divisional Sanghas were established in most Central and Southern regions. There were five divisional sanghas for monks and one divisional Bhikkhuni Sangha

for nuns. Elder Bhikkhuni Huỳnh Liên established a Vietnamese Khất Sĩ Bhikkhuni, headquartered at Ngọc Phương monastery (Gia Định).

After 1954, with the living wish of the patriarch Minh Đăng Quang as well as the mission of preaching the Dharma to his disciples, the Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition was spread to the Central region, and the head of the Khất Sĩ monk group was Venerable Giác Chánh. In 1956, the khat si monk group came to many provinces, such as Phan Thiết, Phan Rí, Phan Rang, and Nha Trang. In 1957 and 1958, the Khất Sĩ Monk group propagated to people in Đà Lạt, Khánh Hòa, Tuy Hòa (Phú Yên), Quy Nhơn, Quảng Ngãi, Đà Nẵng, Thừa Thiên etc.

During this period, the scope of preaching dhamma was enormous. The number of monks, nuns, and Buddhists increased rapidly, so the tendency to establish congregations to develop the Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition was revealed. Specifically, after the first propagate trip, Venerable Giác Chánh led a group of monks to the South; some stayed in the Central region to continue their religious duty, including two congregations. The Congregation II of the elder Giác Tánh, the elder giác Tịnh and the Congregation III of the elder Giác An. These two congregations were formed in 1956. In 1959, the Congregation IV of the venerable Giác Nhiên was established. In 1960, the Congregation V of the elder Giác Lý was established. In 1963, the Congregation VI of venerable Giác Huệ was founded, but it was not until August 1983 that it merged with the Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition.

#### ❖ The development period (1975- till now)

1975 marked the end of the Vietnam War and the liberation of Saigon. All religious activities were revival at that time. Among them, Vietnamese Buddhism quickly entered into the stability and development period. The practiced life of the Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition was also improved and had more advantaged conditions to develop in religion. The ordained monks and nuns stay at the permanent monastery to learn Buddhism together. Since 1980, the first rainy retreat has been organized for monks at Trung Tam Monastery. Onwards it becomes an annual occasion for the rainy season retreat of Khất Sĩ's bhikkhus.

In November 1981, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha was established at Quán Sứ Pagoda, Hà Nội, and the Khất Sĩ Buddhist tradition became one of the nine founding members. Since that day, the Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition has lived in harmony with other practices and continues flourishing. 2014 over 3000 monks and nuns were ordained in the lineage, and about 500 monasteries were constructed. Moreover, the education of monks and nuns is engaging. Some graduated with high degrees from the Buddhist University of Viet Nam and other foreign programs such as Ph.D., M.A, etc. Thus, apart from practicing the Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition interested in the educated system for young monks and nuns who inherit and maintain the blood of Buddhism.

With 32 years of appearing in the world and ten years preaching Buddhism, the master Minh Đăng Quang left behind the next generation's valuable lessons in his lifetime. By experiencing enlightenment of himself, he opens a new way for all human beings, which is asocial to the path of Buddha. In addition, it also suits Vietnamese culture and customs. Due to this issue, the Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition still exists today.

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