

The Image Hall's Architecture of Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition in Viet Nam

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The image hall is a live museum containing the typical architectural features of the different Buddhist traditions in Vietnam in various dynasties for a long time. Influencing Buddhist thoughts and philosophies led to the independent image hall of architectural formation and style. Based on the construction and shape of an image hall, visitors can quickly realize which practices the pagoda belongs to. As one knows, Vietnamese Buddhism survived and developed in three main traditions Mahāyāna, Theravāda, and Khất Sĩ. In general, each practice has unique architectural features of the image hall that create the curiosity of visitors who desire to explore the pagoda's architecture in Vietnam.

In the 20th century, the image hall of Khất Sĩ Buddhist tradition was built popular as a typical architecture, contributing to the list of new constructions of Vietnamese Buddhist Architecture. In both Theravāda and Mahāyāna, the image hall profoundly points out the architectural style's value. On the contrary, the image hall of Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition brings symbolic meanings to its philosophical features. It is considered a meeting spot between the pagoda's architecture and the Buddhist doctrines in modern times. The whole image hall is an octagon with eight sides as eight lotus petals symbolize eight practices of Buddha called the noble eightfold path: (1) right view, (2) right intention, (3) right speech, (4) right action, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right concentration and (8) right mindfulness. On each side is a walk door that leads to the Sakyamuni Buddha statues inside the image hall. Eight large doors always open symbols in eight directions of Feng shui: (1) north, (2) south, (3) east, (4) west, (5) northwest, (6) northeast, (7) southeast, and (8)

southwest. That means whoever from different directions practicing the noble eightfold path will attain enlightenment as the Buddha. In other words, the spirit of preaching Buddhism of Khất Sĩ Buddhist tradition emphasizes equality of the practicing ability of people. For the Buddha's nature, everyone can archive the extreme goal- the Buddhahood without any discrimination about gender, age, caste, occupation, and educated level in society. This character is a symbolic beauty expressing human rights in life.

On the architectural side, the building materials for the image hall are cement, bricks, iron, tiles and wood, and so on. These materials are used very popularly still now. If any pilgrim visits the ancient image hall in North Vietnam, the pilgrim will explore that the bricks were stuck to each other with molasses and clay. This is the construction technique of older adults, and it has become less popular in the modern time. It notes that the image hall originally also is built with wooden material along with other materials. However, the impact of the natural elements and environment, and the image hall made by the wooden is reduced, and not much encouraged.

Since the master Minh Đăng Quang who founded the Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition, attained enlightenment at Mũi Nai, Hà Tiên, he restored Vietnamese Buddhism by the way, connect two Buddhist philosophical resources of Mahāyāna and Theravāda with aspiration "Transmitting the Sakyamuni Right Dharma." The basis of these words, the practical spirit of Khất Sĩ Buddhist Tradition permanently closes with the primitive teachings of the Buddha and the tendency towards simplicity on the propagation of its development. So, the worshipping of Khất Sĩ Buddhist tradition is not an exception. It is pretty simple. Like Theravāda tradition, only the Sakyamuni Buddha statue is worshipped in the right center of the image hall on the tower of 13 stories. The Buddha sitting meditative posture symbols the Buddha-hood, considered the practitioners' ultimate aim, is displayed in the three steps that refer to the Saṅgha step, the Dharma step, and the Buddha step. The arrangement of the Buddha statue has a close tie with the architecture, and the worshipping creates a space both close and open. That makes the image hall more beautiful and solemn.

It is worthy notes that the worshipping combination of the Buddha statue and the tower (stupa) of the image hall looks like the cetiya of the Indian stupa, which is a combination of a stupa and a vihāra. This leads to a difference in its feature in other traditions. According to the teachings of the master Minh Đăng Quang, the Buddha statue has to be worshipped on a tower height of 3 meters and 1.80 meters widths. The tower is made of wooden material, consisting of 13 stories on the top and the body tower. These stories represent from downs to ups of the thirteen realms: (1) Sammāsambuddha (Enlightened One), (2) Bodhisattva, (3) Paccekabuddha (A lone Buddha), (4) Arahant (One who is worthy), (5) Anāgāmī (Non-returning), (6) Sakadāgāmī (Once-returner), (7) Sotāpati (Stream-winner), (8) Devas (Gods

realm), (9) Manuṣya (Human realm), (10) Asuras (Demi-god realm), (11) Tiryag (Animal realm), (12) Preta (Hungry ghost realm), (13) Naraka (Hell realm).

Going inside the image hall, the four pillars are arranged to surround the Buddha's tower. The space of the image hall is simple and well- aired which is not have many pillars like other traditions. During the ceremony, the faithful can sit around the Buddha's tower, facing toward the Buddha for the chanting prayers. In particular, the four pillars symbolize four kinds of people in the Buddhist community: monks, nuns, men, and women. Behind the Buddha's tower is an altar of Master Minh Đăng Quang. This is the worshipped way the front of the Buddha, behind the patriarch symbol connecting the past, the present, and the future, relating this generation to subsequent generations. The structure inside the image hall is quite simple, performing right the inter spirit rather than outside formations. Besides that, it also expresses the cultural character of the Vietnamese people: simple, honest, and tolerant.

On the roof of the image hall, there is a square story with four sides representing the four noble truths which are the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism. Four sides of this building consist of a face side with the name of the pagoda and the three remaining sides with paintings of the important events of the Buddha's life. The name of the pagoda includes four main words. The first two words are "tĩnh xá," meaning the monastery, the pagoda, or the temple. The second word, "Ngọc," implies that the pagoda is a place to preach the noble teachings of Buddhism for the great benefit of everyone. So, "Ngọc" is compared to a pearl. The last word is the name of a pagoda. Significantly, the pagoda's name is usually regarded as the name of the province or the local district. However, it has some exceptions.

The roofs of the image hall are covered by red tiles arranged line by line, creating the roof's gentleness. The patterns for decoration on the roof's corners are mostly lotus images, dharma wheel, or dragon's cloud. Instead of the idea of sacred animals and deva used in the architecture of Mahāyāna and Theravāda, the lotus flower is the best choice for decoration, representing purity and peace in its essence and the nation's culture. So, the lotus image appears mainly in the reliefs and on the walk door. The most symbolic beauty is the logo image of Khát Sĩ Buddhist tradition is put on top of the roof. This logo's image combines a lotus blooming and a light denoting the wisdom of Buddhism. Sometimes, the designers use a lotus instead of the symbol of Khát Sĩ Buddhist tradition. From afar, the whole image hall looks like a blooming lotus with eight panels growing over the ground as the appearance of Khát Sĩ Buddhist Tradition to the world creates a space of mystery and solemnity.

In brief, the large pagodas in Vietnam are built according to different traditions. In Mahāyāna and Theravāda, the history of formation and development of the image hall is more extended than in Khát Sĩ Buddhist Tradition, and each pagoda has a typical architecture and became the ancient pagodas which contribute its value in the field of Vietnamese

Buddhist architecture. In particular, the image hall of Khất Sĩ Buddhist tradition later became the most impression for Buddhist architecture in the 20th century. The architecture results from Buddhist philosophical and cultural features that make it a unique construction of structure and decoration. The essence of the image hall is different in each tradition's shape, form, decoration, and worship. However, we can't deny that its present value is not only an essential part of the spirit of the Vietnamese people. Significantly, the architecture of the image hall also contributes to preserving and upholding the nation's cultural heritage.

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