

Religious Revival of Vietnamese Buddhists in the Czech Republic: A Possible Example of Post-Secular Tendencies in an Immigrant Community

Zdeněk Vojtíšek

<https://doi.org/10.14712/25704893.2021.1>

Abstract: Thirty years passed between the arrival of the Vietnamese minority in the Czech Republic and the dedication of the first shrine of the Vietnamese version of Mahayana Buddhism in 2007. This paper studies the growing activity of Buddhists of Vietnamese origin in the Czech Republic and places it in a social and religious context. It provides a summary of information about the Vietnamese minority in the Czech Republic and Buddhism in Vietnam, emphasizing the tradition practised by Czech Buddhists of Vietnamese descent. In the research part, the paper describes the community of Buddhists of Vietnamese descent in the Czech Republic, analyses trends in its development, describes the places where religious practices occur, and presents data acquired by a questionnaire survey distributed to participants at religious services. The data interpretation suggests that the Vietnamese minority is becoming increasingly more religious. This can be viewed as a part of post-secular tendencies in secular Czech society.

Keywords: Buddhism; Pure Land Buddhism; Mahayana; Immigration; Vietnamese; Czech Republic; Religious minority; Post-secularity.

Abstrakt: Teprve asi po třiceti letech existence vietnamské menšiny na území Československa a Česka byla roku 2007 veřejně uvedena první svatyně vietnamské verze mahájánového buddhismu. Článek sleduje sleduje přibývajících aktivity buddhistů vietnamského původu v Česku a vkládá je do společenského a náboženského kontextu. Shrnuje údaje o vietnamské menšině v Česku, poskytuje relevantní informace o buddhismu ve Vietnamu s důrazem na tradici, v níž praktikují čeští buddhisté vietnamského původu, a charakterizuje společenství buddhistů vietnamského původu v Česku. Ve své výzkumné části pak článek popisuje místa společné náboženské praxe vietnamských buddhistů a prezentuje výsledky dotazníkového šetření provedeného mezi nimi. Interpretace dat naznačuje, že religiozita vietnamské menšiny stoupá. To může být viděno jako část postsekulárních tendencí v sekulární české společnosti.

Klíčová slova: buddhismus; buddhismus Čisté země; mahájánový buddhismus; imigrace; Vietnamci; Česká republika; náboženské menšiny; postsekularismus.

* This article is an abbreviated version of my previous study published in Czech language, which has been translated and slightly adapted for non-Czech audience. ZDENĚK VOJTÍŠEK, „Náboženství vietnamské menšiny v Česku: Příklad postsekulární tendence mezi imigranty“ [“Religion of the Vietnamese Minority in Czechia: An example of post-secular tendencies in an immigrant community”], in: TOMÁŠ HAVLÍČEK (ed.), *Postsekularismus v Česku: Trendy a regionální souvislosti* [Post-secularism in Czechia: Trends and regional context], Praha: Nakladatelství P3K 2020, p. 101–143.

Received: July 1st, 2020

Accepted: June 30th, 2021

doc. PhDr. Zdeněk Vojtíšek, Ph.D., Hussite Theological Faculty, Charles University
e-mail: zdenek.vojtisek@htf.cuni.cz

© 2019 The Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>).

1. Introduction

The study of how the Vietnamese migrate to the Czech Republic has yielded some remarkable results,¹ but previous literature has generally not been particularly interested in the migrants' religious beliefs. Studies focused on the Vietnamese minority in Czech society tend only to cover religion as a side note, if at all. Nevertheless, studies from abroad that consider religion² can supply the public with important data and patterns.

Census data available in the Czech Republic provide only a very rough idea about the members of this minority who identify as Buddhist or Christian. This is partly because of the unclear delimitation of this minority, but mainly because in the last census, in 2011, the question on religion was optional. The minority's religious life is also nearly invisible in society because it generally takes place in places of worship and temples inside of Vietnamese markets or in inconspicuous rented spaces.

This paper only aims to fill the gap in the scholarly study of the Vietnamese minority's religion in the Czech Republic to some extent, as it only focuses on one religion: Pure Land tradition of Mahayana Buddhism. The paper aims to find out whether something that might be called a Buddhist "religious revival" has been taking place in the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic,³ to provide context to trends that could be seen as such a revival, and to describe their nature (what is meant by "revival", is explained at the beginning of Section 6 of this paper). Supporting the idea of post-secularity,⁴ and especially the assumption that revitalised religion of migrants contributes to post-secular tendencies in contemporary Western societies could be the side effect of this paper.

This study consists of eight parts. The introduction is followed by two theoretical parts that provide a summary of all available information on the Vietnamese minority in the Czech Republic and a concise description of the nature of Buddhism in Vietnam. Parts 4 to 7 are dedicated to research, carried out in three stages and its results. In the preparatory stage of the study, participant observation and contact with Buddhists of Vietnamese descent were used to ascertain the development and current state of the community of Buddhists of Vietnamese descent in the Czech Republic. The next stage comprised participant observation in temples managed by Buddhists of Vietnamese descent, usually during holidays, and semi-structured interviews with the leaders of the visited temples. The last stage then consisted of distributing ques-

¹ Most importantly TEREZA FREIDINGEROVÁ, *Vietnamci v Česku a ve světě* [*The Vietnamese in the Czech Republic and the World*], Praha: Slon 2014, *passim*.

² For example, MARTIN BAUMANN, *Migration, Religion, Integration: Buddhistische Vietnamesen und hinduistische Tamilen in Deutschland* [*Migration, Religion, Integration: Buddhist Vietnamese and Hindu Tamils in Germany*], Marburg: Diagonal Verlag 2000, *passim*.

³ This phenomenon was also described in ŠÁRKA MARTÍNKOVÁ, *Vietnamská komunita v Praze* [*The Vietnamese Community in Prague*], Praha: Muzeum hlavního města Prahy 2010, p. 29, calling it "a sort of spiritual revival".

⁴ More: JUSTIN BEAUMONT (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Postsecularity*. New York: Routledge 2019, *passim*, and others.

tionnaires to participants of services in Vietnamese Buddhist temples and places of worship, acquiring data, and interpreting it. In part 7, the results of the last stage of research are presented. Finally, the study concludes in part 8 with statements resulting from the acquired facts. As a whole, the study provides a picture of the community of Buddhists of Vietnamese descent in the Czech Republic, proving that religious life in the community has been revived in the last twelve years.

The study did not ask why the revival of Buddhism in the Vietnamese minority in the Czech Republic occurred after 2006. A probable, though speculative, answer to that might be that as first-generation Vietnamese immigrants started growing old, they started trying to preserve their homeland's cultural heritage for future generations, thus possibly rousing interest in religious affairs. However, it must also be said that the Vietnamese ruling Communist Party changed its policy on Buddhism at that time, and Vietnamese communists started supporting Buddhism. Since members of the Vietnamese minority in the Czech Republic usually follow news from Vietnam (and some are attuned to the Communist Party's views), this may also have been a relevant factor in the revival of Buddhism.

2. The Vietnamese minority in the Czech Republic

The Vietnamese have started migrating to the territory of what is now the Czech Republic around the end of the 1950s, based on the intergovernmental Agreement for Scientific and Technological Cooperation between the Czechoslovak Republic and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam from 1956.⁵ Like many other Central and Eastern European countries, Czechoslovakia started experiencing a more substantial influx of Vietnamese migrants in the 1970s.⁶ The number of Vietnamese immigrants varied from year to year, but the Vietnamese minority in what is now the Czech Republic kept growing despite some fluctuations. Today, the number of Vietnamese people in the Czech Republic (the number of Czech citizens of Vietnamese descent) can be estimated at up to 70,000 people.⁷ This number includes citizens with permanent and temporary residency in the Czech Republic; both those who declare Vietnamese nationality and their mother tongue as Vietnamese (each of these categories had around 30 thousand people in the 2011 census)⁸ and those who clearly acknowledge their Vietnamese cultural background.

⁵ JIŘÍ KOCOUREK, "Vietnamci v České republice" [The Vietnamese in the Czech Republic], in: Tatjana Šišková (ed.), *Menšiny a migranti v České republice* [Minorities and Migrants in the Czech Republic], Praha: Portál 2001, p. 103.

⁶ FREIDINGEROVÁ, *Vietnamci* [The Vietnamese], p. 66. Formerly, the figure of over 60 thousand was mentioned by MARTÍNKOVÁ, *Vietnamská komunita*, [The Vietnamese Community], p. 38.

⁷ In: FREIDINGEROVÁ, *Vietnamci* [The Vietnamese], p. 82.

⁸ „Databáze výsledků ze Sčítání lidu, domů a bytů k 26. 3. 2011“ [“Database of results from the census on 26 March 2011”], Praha: Český statistický úřad [Czech Statistical Office] 2012, accessed 15s December 2018, available online at <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/home>.

Members of this community usually describe themselves as indifferent to religion. They do maintain altars for ancestor worship at home and sometimes also at the workplace and keep them stocked with fruit, incense and pictures of family members and ancestors,⁹ but “the burning of incense sticks, sacrifice to the ancestors, and other practices are not seen as part of religious rituals but as manifestations of cultural identity”.¹⁰ Their performing Buddhist religious practices during holidays can be interpreted similarly. This indifference to religion is often reflected by those Vietnamese who have started to attend worship in Buddhist temples more often or even regularly. When speaking about themselves, they often distinguish strictly between the past when they formally practiced home worship and took part in holiday rituals, and their current state of mind when they consider themselves “real” Buddhists. It can be observed that becoming a member of a community surrounding a Vietnamese Buddhist temple requires some sort of “conversion” similar to that of Christianity. In any case, only these two traditions – Mahayana Buddhism and Christianity¹¹ – allow for a stronger religious engagement in the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic.

3. Buddhism in Vietnam

According to legend, Buddhism (Vietnamese: *Phật giáo*) has been present in the territory of what is now Vietnam since the 3rd century BC – that is, before the Chinese rule of the northern part of the country started.¹² The Buddhist sangha (Sanskrit: *samgha*, a community led by monks) has had a significant, sometimes even crucial cultural and political role. This was especially true during the Late Ly (1010–1225) and Tran (1225–1400) dynasties.¹³ The role of Buddhism “for the common folk remained unshakeable even in the following centuries” after the political influence of the monks had started waning.¹⁴

In Vietnam, there are two oldest Buddhist traditions: Theravada (Sanskrit: *Theravāda*) Buddhism, which teaches worshippers to preserve what is seen as Buddha’s original teachings; and Mahayana (Sanskrit: *Mahāyāna*) Buddhism, which is more open to innovation and to assimilating elements of local religions. Theravada Buddhists are the dominant group in the neighbouring Cambodia and Laos and other countries to the north-west (Thailand and Myanmar), but in Vietnam, they are a minority and only live in the southern part of the country. This is because the growing

⁹ KOCOUREK, „Vietnamci“ [The Vietnamese], p. 103.

¹⁰ JÁN IČO, *Náboženství ve Vietnamu [Religion in Vietnam]*, Praha: Muzeum hlavního města Prahy 2010, p. 31.

¹¹ More about Christians of Vietnamese origin in the Czech Republic: VOJTÍŠEK, „Náboženství vietnamské menšiny v Česku“, p. 101–143.

¹² LUCIE HLAVATÁ, JÁN IČO, PETRA KARLOVÁ and MÁRIA STRAŠÁKOVÁ, *Dějiny Vietnamu [The History of Vietnam]*, Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2008, p. 48–49.

¹³ HLAVATÁ et al., *Dějiny Vietnamu [The History of Vietnam]*, p. 49.

¹⁴ IČO, *Náboženství ve Vietnamu [Religion in Vietnam]*, p. 15.

influence of the Chinese, who ruled the Vietnamese for a thousand years, from the 2nd century BC until the 10th century AD,¹⁵ pushed in the Chinese-style Mahayana Buddhism from the north.

The Chinese- and, in the end, also Vietnamese-style Mahayana Buddhism is characterised by its overlap with the spiritual traditions of Taoism (Vietnamese: *Đạo giáo*) and Confucianism (Vietnamese: *Nho giáo*). This overlap is represented by the words *Tam đạo* or *Tam giáo*, meaning “three ways” – three schools or three religions. Mahayana Buddhism arrived in what is now Vietnam in two schools. The first is the Chán school (*thiền* in Vietnamese; in the West it is better known in its Japanese form as Zen), practised in monasteries, and the second is the Pure Land school of the Buddha Amitabha (Sanskrit: *Amitābha*), which attracts a broad spectrum of worshippers.

Pure Land Buddhism (Vietnamese: *Tịnh Độ Tông*) of Buddha Amitabha (Vietnamese: *A-di-đà Phật*) was formed in China in roughly the 6th century.¹⁶ This school strongly emphasises the Mahayana tradition of reverence for Buddhas as awakened beings who achieved the state of nirvana (Sanskrit: *nirvāṇa*) and for Bodhisattvas as beings who rejected nirvana to ease the suffering of all sentient beings and to help them on their path to nirvana. Mahayana Buddhists from the Pure Land school believe that Buddha Amitabha reigns far in the West and, through his vows that he took as a Bodhisattva, he enables his worshippers to be reborn into his realm. In the Pure Land, one can achieve nirvana with the next incarnation. Buddha Amitabha is accompanied on his path of compassion and help for all beings on their way to nirvana by Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Sanskrit: *Avalokiteśvara*), who manifests as the female Guanyin (Vietnamese: *Quan Âm*) in China and Vietnam. This school’s Buddhism is inseparably tied to ancestor worship which has pre-Buddhist roots.

The Vietnamese form of the Pure Land school only differs from the Chinese form in details: the texts are in Vietnamese, Vietnamese monasteries hold religious authority, and the school commemorates Vietnamese heroes, respected rulers, and other significant figures, but religious practice is not markedly different when it comes to personal life or the liturgy.

The Pure Land school is currently represented in Vietnam by an overarching organisation called the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS).¹⁷ It was founded in 1981, and it is one of the five most important religions registered by the Vietnamese state (alongside Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, and Hinduism). The Pure Land tradition is also represented by another body: The Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association, an organisation registered by the Vietnamese government in 2007. Vietnamese communists initially harboured hostile attitudes towards Buddhism and religion in general, but in the case of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, this attitude slowly shifted towards tolerance and collaboration in the 1990s. In the second decade of the 21st century, the attitude towards Vietnamese Buddhism has been unabashedly positive, with the state authorities supporting Buddhism through the VBS as part of the national cultural

¹⁵ HLA VATÁ et al., *Dějiny Vietnamu [The History of Vietnam]*, p. 26.

¹⁶ EDWARD CONZE, *Stručné dějiny buddhismu [A Short History of Buddhism]*, Brno: Jota 1997, p. 81.

¹⁷ An alternative name is the “National Vietnam Buddhist Sangha”.

heritage – even abroad. About half of the population officially identifies as Buddhist,¹⁸ but it can be supposed that some of them accept Buddhism as a part of the traditional mixture of religious and folk traditions, called the “three ways”. In fact, the number of people who practice Buddhism outside of holidays and cultural occasions is estimated roughly at 10–14 million from 90 million in total – meaning 12–16% of the population. Around 80% of Buddhists belong to the Pure Land school.¹⁹

The vast majority of Vietnamese people living in the Czech Republic and their descendants come from the northern part of the country²⁰, which has a strong Mahayana tradition of the Pure Land of Buddha Amitabha. Vietnamese Zen Buddhists or Theravada Buddhists are not publicly visible in the Czech Republic. While Vietnamese Buddhists in the Czech Republic know and respect the world-famous Vietnamese Zen monk Thích Nhất Hạnh, they do not count themselves among his followers. When talking about Vietnamese Buddhists in the Czech Republic, we will therefore generally be referring to the followers of the Mahayana Pure Land school of Buddha Amitabha. After all, these devotees usually refer to themselves and their religion as “Vietnamese Buddhism” (Vietnamese: *Phật Giáo Việt Nam*). A difference from other countries with a Vietnamese diaspora is that this name does not include the Vietnamese form of Zen Buddhism,²¹ as that is not present in the Czech Republic (with some exceptions, such as individual Czech nationals who are part of the Order of Interbeing of Monk Thích Nhất Hạnh).

4. Preparatory research stage: methodology and results

In the preparatory stage of the research, I first gathered all the available data on members of the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic who identify as Buddhist. Then, I visited a temple for Buddhists of Vietnamese descent in Prague-Písnice eight times and talked to the people responsible for taking care of the temple.²² I also attended several official holiday celebrations which took part in Prague outside of this temple in larger and more representative spaces.²³ I contacted the preparatory committee of Společensví buddhismu v ČR [The Czech Buddhism Association] religious society and talked to its members,²⁴ as well as other Buddhists living in the Czech

¹⁸ HLAVATÁ et al., *Dějiny Vietnamu* [The History of Vietnam], p. 9.

¹⁹ This information was acquired in an interview (27 August 2017) with the Venerable Thich Duc Thien, the Secretary General of the National Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and it corresponds to other sources, for example: “Press Statement on the visit to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief” [online], *The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN)*, 31 July 2014, accessed 31 August 2017, available online at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14914&LangID=E>.

²⁰ In: FREDINGEROVÁ, *Vietnamci* [The Vietnamese], p. 188–189.

²¹ Unlike for example ALEXANDER SOUCY, “Reappraisal of Vietnamese Buddhism’s Status as ‘Ethnic’”, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 12 (2, 2017): 24.

²² These included most importantly Mr. Nam Huong Nguyen.

²³ Most importantly the Vu Lan and Vesak holidays.

²⁴ Ms. Thi Thu Vu, Ms. Ha Tranova, Khanh Nga Le, and others.

Republic²⁵ and visitors from Vietnam.²⁶ This process gave me a general overview of the Vietnamese Buddhists' activities and how they are organised. The preparatory stage yielded the following conclusions:

The results of the 2011 census showed that about 500–700 of the people who declared Vietnamese nationality or Vietnamese as their mother tongue were Buddhists.²⁷ 700 is also a number corresponding with the information provided by the representatives of Vietnamese Buddhist temples in the Czech Republic in interviews. The interviews showed that about 1% of the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic actively attend community activities in Buddhist temples. The observation²⁸ and other stages of this research showed that the number of visitors rises during Buddhist holidays. The research results show that the limited number of visitors in the temple outside of main holidays may be due to Vietnamese Buddhists being busy with their demanding businesses or because they live too far from the temple.

When working with the estimate of 500–700 Vietnamese Buddhists, we must consider that the explanatory part of the census forms offered 32 registered churches and religious communities as an example, but none of them belonged to the school of Buddhism that is common in Vietnam. The listed and registered religious communities at that time only included a single Buddhist one – the Diamond Vehicle Buddhism. In order to count for another branch of Buddhism, the respondent would have had to fill in the words “Buddhism”, “Vietnamese Buddhism”, or “Mahayana Buddhism” without using the list. Since filling out the question on “Religious faith” was not obligatory, we can assume that some Vietnamese Buddhists chose not to provide this information, just like another 45% of respondents.²⁹

As we have mentioned above, the closest religion to Vietnamese Buddhism in the list of 32 pre-filled religions in the 2011 census was a religious community called the Diamond Way Buddhism. Probably because the name was similar, 200 citizens of Vietnamese nationality or those whose mother tongue was Vietnamese picked this option. However, this number in no way corresponds to reality³⁰, and it is probable that these respondents chose this religious community because of the similarity in the name, which also includes the word “Buddhism”. Another factor in play was probably the language barrier.

From observation, Vietnamese Buddhism in the Czech Republic seems to be an ethnic, not convert religion.³¹ This difference between ethnic Buddhism and convert

²⁵ For example, with Mr. Hoang Chau, Mr. Hai Hoi, and Ms. Le Hoang Yen.

²⁶ For example, with the Venerable Thich Duc Thien.

²⁷ „Databáze výsledků...” [“Results Database...”], <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/home>.

²⁸ For example, during the holidays of Vu Lan 27 August 2017 or Vesak 22 May 2011.

²⁹ „Databáze výsledků...” [“Results Database...”], <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/home>.

³⁰ This became clear from my correspondence with the representatives of the Diamond Way Buddhism community, 3 September 2018.

³¹ The theory of two “Buddhisms”, ethnic Buddhism and convert Buddhism, was created and further developed in the works of Charles S. Prebish and his opponents. For example, see Charles S. Prebish, “Reflections on the Transmission of Buddhism to America”, in: JACOB NEEDLEMAN & GEORGE BAKER (eds.), *Understanding the New Religions*, New York: Seabury 1978, p. 153–172.

Buddhism in the Czech context is evident compared to the abovementioned Diamond Way Buddhism community, which comprises converts, ethnic Czechs, who do not come from Buddhist families. The previously mentioned followers of Thích Nhất Hạnh are a similar example. Compared to that, Vietnamese Buddhists of the Pure Land school focus on their national minority, without any missionary activity outside of their ethnic group. They focus on passing the Buddhist way of life on within their families. This is also corroborated by the fact that there were no Buddhists of non-Vietnamese descent in the temple during my participant observation and that all religious literature, PR publications, and online marketing are only available in Vietnamese.³² Monks' speeches and other public appearances during holiday celebrations are always in Vietnamese without interpretation.

This orientation inwards means that the religious life of Buddhists in the Czech Vietnamese community is almost “invisible” for the rest of Czech society. This isolation of Vietnamese Buddhists also means they have no relationships with other Buddhist communities in the Czech Republic (with one exception mentioned below), making Vietnamese Buddhism essentially “invisible” even for other Czech Buddhists.³³

Perhaps the first organisation of Vietnamese Buddhists in the Czech Republic was a civic society called “Společenství vietnamského buddhismu v České republice” [“Association of Vietnamese Buddhism in the Czech Republic”], founded in 2006. In 2014, it gained legal personality as a registered association. However, its name is often misquoted – even by members of the association in public speeches and documents. The most common versions are “Svaz buddhistických Vietnamců v ČR” [“Association of Buddhist Vietnamese in the Czech Republic”], “Svaz vietnamských buddhistů” [“Association of Vietnamese Buddhists”], “Sdružení vietnamských buddhistů” [“Society of Vietnamese Buddhists”], and so on. This society has patronage over Buddhist activities in several (though not all) Vietnamese Buddhist meeting places in the Czech Republic. It maintains close contact with Vietnamese authorities and the “Vietnam Buddhist Sangha” (VBS) supported by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. This is also clearly shown by the presence and speeches of high representative of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pham Thi Kim Hoa and secretary-general of the VBS, the Venerable Thich Duc Thien, at a celebration of the Vu Lan holiday connected with a celebration of the 10th anniversary of “Společenství vietnamského buddhismu v České republice” [“Association of Vietnamese Buddhism in the Czech Republic”].³⁴

There are also local Buddhist associations in different places in the Czech Republic, which manage temples and organise their activities. The last one was registered in

³² An exception was a Czech poster invitation for a celebration of the Vu Lan holiday connected with a celebration of the 10th anniversary of Společenství vietnamského buddhismu v České republice [Association of Vietnamese Buddhism in the Czech Republic], 27 August 2017.

³³ It is telling that the Buddhism practised by the Vietnamese community was not taken into account in a project that mapped dozens of Czech Buddhist communities: Jan Honzík, *Jednota v rozmanitosti: Buddhismus v České republice* [Unity in Diversity: Buddhism in the Czech Republic], Praha: DharmaGaia 2010, *passim*.

³⁴ The celebration took place on 27 August 2017 in Prague in the Sapa marketplace.

2017 in Prague under the name “Centrum vietnamského buddhismu v ČR” [“Centre for Vietnamese Buddhism in the Czech Republic”]. This fragmented organisational framework proves what one can observe when communicating with these communities: each community is completely independent in terms of organisation, finance, and its connection to international partners – in how they get monks from abroad to attend their holiday celebrations and other religious practices.

Monks do not need to be present for religious ceremonies at all times, but they are welcome, especially for ceremonies on holidays, and to provide guidance and preach outside of holiday times. Some Vietnamese Buddhist temples in the Czech Republic have rooms set apart for a monk or monks. Vietnamese Buddhists generally request monk visits from the abovementioned “Vietnam Buddhist Sangha” (VBS), Vietnam’s Buddhist umbrella organisation, or the “Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association”. Monks from Germany (usually also of Vietnamese descent) also sometimes come for shorter visits (especially in Western Bohemia). The struggle with getting enough Buddhist monks for holiday celebrations meant Vietnamese Buddhists in the Czech Republic had to start collaborating with Czech monks ordained in the Tibetan Buddhism tradition, who usually serve in the Liberec “Rabten Čhödarling” [“Rabten Choedarling”] community. They get invited, alongside monks from abroad, to Vietnamese Buddhist holiday celebrations.³⁵

Vietnamese Buddhists in the Czech Republic have been trying to ensure better conditions for Vietnamese monks who currently have to struggle with unfavourable visa conditions. This was also one of the main motivations for Vietnamese Buddhist communities to register a religious association.³⁶ This attempt to create a community with the status of a “church or religious association” was mainly initiated by Vietnamese Buddhists in Prague. They were planning to replace the abovementioned “Společenství vietnamského buddhismu v České republice” [“Association of Vietnamese Buddhism in the Czech Republic”] and possibly even other, local associations, and unify and centralise the Vietnamese Buddhist community in the Czech Republic.³⁷ However, not all local communities agreed with this intention.³⁸ Based on Act 3/2002 Coll., the preparatory committee submitted a proposal for registering a church and religious association under the name “Společenství buddhismu v České republice” [“Community of Buddhism in the Czech Republic”] to the Ministry of Culture on 29 January 2016.³⁹ In December of 2017, the Ministry rejected the proposal because the religious association failed to present a sufficient number of members.⁴⁰ “Společenství buddhismu v České republice” [“Community of Buddhism in

³⁵ The author met these monks (the Brázda brothers) at the celebrations of the Vesak holiday 22 May 2011 and the Vu Lan holiday 27 August 2017.

³⁶ Interview with Ms. Thi Thu Vu 12 January 2017 in Prague.

³⁷ Interview with Ms. Thi Thu Vu 12 January 2017 in Prague.

³⁸ Interview with the Plzeň temple manager Mr. Do 18 March 2017.

³⁹ Společenství buddhismu v České republice [Community of Buddhism in the Czech Republic] was founded on the 26 November 2015.

⁴⁰ Decision of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic from 5 December 2017, file no. MK 75601/2017 OLP.

the Czech Republic”] was therefore not registered at that time. Vietnamese Buddhists themselves believe that the registration process was unsuccessful mainly because of communication problems between the proposal initiators from Prague and communities from outside of Prague.⁴¹ Finally, the third attempt was successful, and the Community was registered as a religious association in June 2020.

Local Vietnamese Buddhist communities are generally concentrated around temples or at least improvised places of worship furnished similarly to temples. Currently, there are thirteen real temples or pagodas in the Czech Republic. In 2008, the first temple was opened in Varnsdorf, and another temple was consecrated in the same year in Prague-Písnice. Other temples followed in Brno, Dubí-Pozorce (Teplice District), in Cheb and Cheb-Svatý Kříž, Chomutov, Karlovy Vary, Most, Ostrava, Plzeň, Prague-Malešice, and in Strážné (Prachatice District).⁴² Apart from these established places, some holiday celebrations also take place in improvised places of worship⁴³ or tents in other places in the Czech Republic. There are plans for building a new temple, or rather a more complex facility in Prague-Písnice.⁴⁴ Surprisingly, there is only a loose correlation between the locations of temples and places of worship and places with a higher density of citizens of Vietnamese descent (see the map).

5. Second research stage: methodology and results

In the second stage of the research, I contacted the representatives of all 13 temples and visited the temples (but in the end I was unable to secure access into the temples in Chomutov and Most). In some of them, I took part in Buddhist ceremonies in the role of a participant-observer. The aim of these visits was to appoint contact persons for the distribution and return of questionnaires in the following research stage. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with the temple leaders⁴⁵ and took notes regarding the temples' location, their internal layout, and their equipment for religious practices.

In the interviews, temple leaders repeatedly stated that the temple has been established to strengthen the cultural identity of third-generation Vietnamese in the Czech Republic, but that in time it developed into a place of true religious practice. A typical example of how a local temple can be established is the first temple in the

⁴¹ Interview with local Buddhists in the temples in Dubí 2 March 2018 and Brno 14 March 2018.

⁴² The temples are listed in alphabetical order, as the years they were established are generally not known, even to the local believers.

⁴³ An example is the provisional building in the village Potůčky (Karlovy Vary District). More in: Freidingerová, *Vietnamci [The Vietnamese]*, p. 172-173.

⁴⁴ ZDENĚK VOJTÍŠEK and PAVEL HOŠEK, “Vietnamský Vesak” [Vietnamese Vesak], *Dingir* 14 (2, 2011): 41.

⁴⁵ For example, in Varnsdorf in an interview with Mr. Vu Linh Ngoc; in Ostrava in an interview with Ing. Chau Van Hoang and Ing. Trinh Tan, in Brno with Ms. Phung Thi Nga, in Cheb with Mr. Le Anh Phong etc.

Czech Republic, which was founded in the North Bohemian town of Varnsdorf. Two Czech citizens (mother and daughter) of Vietnamese descent and nationality who lived in Varnsdorf travelled to their native town in Vietnam in 2005, contacted a local Buddhist monk, invited him to the Czech Republic, and organised his visit in the same year. Together with some other members of the Varnsdorf Vietnamese community, they started building a provisional place of worship in the attic of one of the houses. The place of worship was officially opened in 2006. Since then, a Buddhist monk from Vietnam Thích Thanh Phúc has been coming about twice a year for two to three months. The Varnsdorf project turned out to be viable, and the locals started a public collection. In 2007, they founded a civic association called “Vietnamský klub sympatizantů s buddhismem v EU” [“Vietnamese club of Buddhism sympathisers in the EU”], which currently has the status of a registered association. Then they bought and refurbished a villa in Varnsdorf and brought in Buddha statues from Vietnam in a ceremonial parade in the same year. The Varnsdorf “Chrám nebeského milosrdenství” (*Thiên Ân*) [Temple of Celestial Mercy] was consecrated and opened on 15 January 2008, in the presence of a visiting monk, Phuc, the Vietnamese ambassador in the Czech Republic, and a representative of the Varnsdorf Town Hall. The main organiser of the temple project was the grandson/son of the abovementioned women, Vu Linh Ngoc.⁴⁶

The location and exterior of Pure Land Buddhism temples in the Czech Republic vary quite a great deal. Sometimes, they are placed in separate buildings, built or remodelled for this purpose, but they can also only take up a few rooms in a non-religious building. An outstanding example is the very large and generous newly built temple in Cheb-Svatý Kříž. The villa in Varnsdorf refurbished into a temple is also rather spacious, while the temple in Dubí-Pozorce is located in a considerably smaller remodelled two-storey house on the main street. The temple in Strážné only uses a very small separate building. The Most and Cheb temples are situated in several rooms on the first floor of shopping malls, while the Chomutov and Plzeň temples use non-residential spaces on the ground floor of residential houses. About half of the temples are situated in (mostly) Vietnamese market areas: that is the case for Prague-Písnice, Brno, Cheb-Svatý Kříž, Ostrava, Prague-Malešice, and Strážné. These temples are open during the day, and visitors can access the temple rooms (but not the background facility rooms). One of the altars in the Prague-Písnice temple is even easily accessible from the outside to allow devotees to visit quickly without having to take off shoes or coats.

On the other hand, temples located in retail or residential spaces tend not to be publicly accessible. A visitor who does not belong to the Vietnamese minority and who is planning to visit the temple outside of public worship times can encounter significant difficulties. None of the Czech Vietnamese Buddhist temples is located in

⁴⁶ Mr. Vu Linh Ngoc explained how the Varnsdorf temple was established in an interview on 13 July 2017.

attractive, conspicuous public spaces and people who do not frequent a temple only rarely know that it exists – often even if they live very close to it.

Temple spaces that are a part of larger buildings are always clearly delimited by Dharma Guardian statues (Vietnamese: *Hộ pháp*) on the sides of the entrance or close to it. In the case of temples in separate buildings, the surroundings are generally maintained and decorated with Buddhist flags, statues, images from Buddha's life on Earth, gardens, benches, etc. Some temples also have prominent statues of Bodhisattva Guanyin (*Quan Âm*). Guanyin takes the form of a woman with a vase full of the nectar of compassion which she sprinkles around (often using a willow branch). Many Vietnamese see Guanyin as the “gentle mother” (Vietnamese: *mẹ hiền*) who lends her power to sentient beings in hardship and crisis.⁴⁷ Some temples also have a small oven for burning sacrifices to the dead. In ancestor worship, the smoke carries the essence of these gifts – models of money, clothes, houses, cars, motorcycles, mobile phones, planes, and any other things the deceased might use – into the spirit world.

Where the size of the temple allows, it also includes a kitchen, a common room, bathrooms, and a flat for the monk or monks. To access temple spaces, visitors must take off shoes. Where possible, temple spaces are divided into a main space with an altar and a place for the worship of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and a separate place or multiple places (usually in the anteroom or on the sides) for ancestor worship.

A statue of Buddha Amitabha (*A-di-đà Phật*) stands in the centre of the altar, alongside statues of the Shakyamuni Buddha (Vietnamese: *Thích Ca Mâu Ni Phật*) and Maitreya Buddha (Vietnamese: *Di Lạc Phật*). There may be separate statues of the Buddhas of the past, present, and future (Vietnamese: *Tam thế Phật*) or the present, past, and future may be represented by the three previously mentioned Buddhas. Amitabha represents the past. As Bodhisattva Dharmakara (Sanskrit: *Dharmākara*), he made 48 vows, and in two of them, he swore that anyone who follows him with trust and devotion would be reborn in the Pure Land. The present is represented by the historical Buddha, Siddhattha Gotama, Shakyamuni (Sanskrit: *Siddhārtha Gautama*, *Śākyamuni*, possibly 563–483), as the one who reminded people of Buddha Amitabha's deeds in our age. He is sometimes depicted on the altar as a statue of a child or a man who has just died (achieved parinirvana, Sanskrit: *parinirvāṇa*). Future may be referred to by Maitreya, the future Buddha, sometimes in the form of Budai (Vietnamese: *Bố Đai*), the laughing, prosperous Buddha. The altar also generally contains a statue of Bodhisattva Guanyin (*Quan Âm*) – either as the abovementioned woman with a vase or as a statue with a thousand eyes and thousand hands (Vietnamese: *Nghìn Mắt Nghìn Tay Quan Âm*), which she uses to seek out suffering beings and support them. The altar also generally includes statues of Medicine Buddhas. On the sides, it may be flanked by statues of Ananda (Vietnamese: *A Nan Đà*, Sanskrit: *Ananda*) and Kashyapa (Vietnamese: *Cà Diếp*, Sanskrit: *Kaśyapa*), the historical Buddha's

⁴⁷ ALLISON TRUITT, “Quán Thế Âm of the Transpacific”, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 12 (2, 2017): 85.

closest students, or other good beings close to the historical Buddha or belonging to the set of transcendental Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

The walls or side altars of the temple may also be decorated with paintings or statues of Amitabha and his celestial guides and helpers and many other depictions of spiritual beings. Some of the decorations may include light effects. The altars also contain sacrificial gifts: mostly flowers, fruits, sweets, or water. There is a separate space with sand for lit incense sticks, and candles are usually placed around the temple. When worshipping at the altar, devotees pray for protection, health, and prosperity, invoke Buddha Amitabha and other spiritual beings, bring and renew sacrificial gifts, and light candles and incense sticks.

Many temples have pillows in front of the main altar for participants of services. These include the singing of sutras (most often the Lotus Sutra and the Amitabha Sutra), bowing, invocations of Amitabha's name, and prayers of wishes and blessing for all living beings. Services usually take place in the morning and the evening – if enough participants attend. Two instruments are used during meditation: the fish drum and the Tibetan bowl. Strikes of the fish drum dictate the rhythm of mantra recital, and a strike on the bowl signals the time to bow. The mantra “I take refuge in Buddha Amitabha” (Vietnamese: *Nam Mô A Di Đà Phật*) is usually written in different places (in notebooks, on seats, etc.), and sometimes it is also continuously sung from the speakers. The main hall also usually contains bronze bells and gongs used in mass celebrations.

The side altar or altars usually serve for ancestor worship and for paying respects to the temple founders, important rulers, national heroes, etc. Figures that are often commemorated this way include King Trần Nhân Tông (1258–1308) or President Hồ Chí Minh (1890–1969). Apart from these statues, paintings, and photos, the side altar may also include a depiction of Bodhisattva Kshitigarbha (Vietnamese: *Địa Tạng*, Sanskrit: *Kṣitigarbha*), who frees living beings from hell in Mahayana Buddhism, as well as other statues. Photos of relatives who died in the Czech Republic and in Vietnam surround the altar. Gifts of fruits, flowers, candles, and incense sticks can be found here as well. As we have mentioned above, some citizens of Vietnamese descent see paying respects to the dead as a form of remembrance, and these practices are often not seen as religious.

More people usually visit the temple on the first and fifteenth day of every lunar month and the three main holidays: the first day of the new lunar year, the holiday commemorating Buddha's birth, Vesak, and the day of deceased ancestors, Vu Lan. Holidays also include other ceremonial practices: candles and lanterns are lit, and devotees pour water over the statue of Buddha-child (during Vesak). It is also very welcome if monks are present at holiday celebrations to impart Buddhist teachings to visitors and answer any questions. For practical reasons, holiday celebrations cannot take the same form as in Vietnam – as Freidingerová mentioned, for example, “the lunar new year celebration in Vietnam can take up to 14 days.” All life on the streets literally grinds to a halt during celebrations; there is no business activity, people do not go to work, children do not attend school. In the Czech Republic

these celebrations usually take up no more than one evening when retailers close their shops early.⁴⁸

6. Third research stage and its methodology

The research aimed to find whether the building of Buddhist temples could be seen as a religious revival in the Vietnamese minority in the Czech Republic and, if so, what the character of this revival was. A necessary assumption is that the religious revival can be proven when respondents have experienced a positive change in relation to the Buddhist tradition since the opening of a temple – when they attend a temple regularly, when they understand the nature of Buddhism, when they partake in joint Buddhist practice, and when they are involved with the local Buddhist community.

Based on the experience I gained in the first two research stages, I asked the following questions in the third stage, and I set specific criteria for evaluating the answers as positive.

1. Have the Vietnamese Buddhists involved with one of the 13 temples in the Czech Republic experienced a qualitative change regarding their faith? Has the establishment of a temple close to their homes brought a revival of their Buddhist faith and practice? – I decided that I would see the answer to this question as positive if more than two-thirds of the respondents stated that they gained interest in Buddhism after they were 15 years old or older and practised their religion in the temple. If the respondent gained interest in Buddhism as an adolescent or adult, their religiosity is not a matter of habit, passed down by the parents and built in childhood, but personal decision. Buddhist practice in the temple proves that the respondent's religious life has changed since the existence of temples is a relatively new thing (a decade old at most).

2. Is this potential change of religious attitudes or personal religious revival connected to migration? Was this change or revival significantly motivated by the respondent's newly acquired status as a member of a national minority resulting from recent immigration? – I decided I would see the answer to these questions as positive if more than two-thirds of the respondents stated that their interest in Buddhism was stoked by family members or an existing Vietnamese Buddhist community.

3. Has this potential change of religious attitudes resulted in the formation of a religious community? Are newcomers integrated into the community in a way that proves the existence of a local Buddhist community (*sangha*)? – I will see the answer to these questions as positive if more than two-thirds of the respondents visit a Buddhist temple at least once a month and attend events of the Buddhist community.

4. Is the revival in the Vietnamese community, which resulted in the building of temples, truly religious in nature? Can we say that temple visitors are Buddhists? Has this change of religious attitudes been accompanied by a conscious acceptance of values that can be called Buddhist and practice common for other Mahayana Bud-

⁴⁸ FREIDINGEROVÁ, *Vietnamci* [*The Vietnamese*], p. 172.

dhists? – I decided I would see the answer to these questions as positive if more than two-thirds of the respondents exhibited attitudes, beliefs, values, active practice, and involvement in the community that correspond to the characteristics of other Mahayana Buddhists.

I used a questionnaire to answer these research questions. My respondent target group were people involved with a local Vietnamese Buddhist temple. The questionnaire had 16 questions. The first seven asked for the respondent's basic characteristics: their gender, age, nationality, education level, etc. Questions 8–13 were closed and had 4–6 answer options. They asked about the context of the respondent's interest in Buddhism, the manner and frequency of their Buddhist practice, and the level of their involvement with the Buddhist community. The last three questions (14–16) were open, allowing the respondents to express what Buddhism means for them, what their religious practice looks like, and how they engage with the life of the Buddhist community. The questionnaires were available in two language versions – Vietnamese and Czech.

The questionnaire survey took place between 1 July 2017 and 30 April 2018. I distributed the questionnaires to all 13 Czech Vietnamese Buddhist temples using contact persons (temple leaders or other trustworthy figures) whom I approached personally to explain the questionnaire's purpose. All these persons consented to the collaboration. The distributed package included the questionnaires and a stamped envelope with an address to which the filled-out questionnaires were sent.

In general, around 400 questionnaires were distributed this way. It is impossible to give a definite number since contact persons in two temples asked for the questionnaires in electronic form and printed them themselves, and at least in one temple, questionnaires were copied. However, although contact persons proclaimed their willingness to help, the return rate of the questionnaires was relatively low. In the end, I managed to collect 80 filled out questionnaires, but these were only from four, or rather five temples: in Prague (8), Brno (16), Dubí by Teplice (15), and Cheb (41). The last town has two Vietnamese Buddhist temples: in Svatý Kříž, a periphery of Cheb, and in the centre. The questionnaire, however, makes no difference between these two temples.

Therefore, the filled-out questionnaires cover about one-tenth of the estimated number of Vietnamese community members who visit one of the Vietnamese Buddhist temples. The research also confirmed the general assumption that the Vietnamese minority is rather closed off and not very interested in collaborating with outsiders. The preparatory stage of the study yielded a hopeful picture of widespread and easy collaboration with contact persons in all the temples, but this hope turned out to be mostly unfounded. One of the reasons for later communication problems with contact persons was that they were not connected to the local temple closely enough and spent too long in Vietnam.

Regardless, the absolute number (80) of the returned questionnaires is not necessarily small. A bigger problem is that this one-tenth comes only from four temples, which is less than one-quarter of the total number, without any representation of, for

example, the Ostrava temple, which is close to a relatively large part of the Vietnamese community.

The 80 respondents included 63 women and 17 men. One respondent was under 20, 7 were between 20–30, 24 between 30–40, 20 between 40–50, 24 between 50–60, and 4 were over 60. The vast majority (85%) of all the respondents were therefore middle-aged – between 30 and 60. 95% of the respondents stated their nationality was Vietnamese, with two of these declaring dual nationality – Czech and Vietnamese. Only two respondents stated their nationality was Czech. The assumption that respondents would almost exclusively belong to the Vietnamese community was therefore confirmed.

Answers to Question 4 also proved that most of the temple visitors were immigrants. The question was: “What country were you born in?” 89% of respondents answered “In Vietnam”, while 10% were born in Czechoslovakia or the Czech Republic (one respondent did not answer this question). Most respondents had gained a secondary education (62,5%) and the majority lived in towns with 3 to 90 thousand people. This is presumably because most respondents were visitors of the temples in Cheb and Dubí u Teplic – towns with 30 and 8 thousand people, respectively.

Another point of interest in the context of the census results from 2011, with 500–700 people identifying as Buddhist, is question 7, which was: “Did you identify as Buddhist in the 2011 census?” In the answers, exactly one half (40) of the respondents answered no. This suggests that the real number of Buddhists in the Vietnamese minority might be higher than the census showed and higher even than our estimates, based on the number of visitors to Buddhist temples. Thus, in reality, the Vietnamese minority might have over a thousand Buddhists.

7. Third stage results

All the abovementioned research questions will be repeated in the following paragraphs. I have included the responses to the questionnaire survey with them.

1. Have Vietnamese Buddhists experienced a qualitative change in the manner of their faith? Has the establishment of a temple close to their homes brought a revival of their Buddhist faith and practice?

Over 71% of respondents gained interest in Buddhism when they were 15 or older. The highest number of respondents (39%) stated that their interest started at 30–50. The results clearly show that the respondents consciously chose Buddhism at an age when they could make decisions responsibly. Therefore, a decisive number of respondents have their faith as more than just an unreflected family or national tradition. Only one respondent does not use the temple for their Buddhist practice (another did not answer). Most respondents practice both in the temple and at home (74%). Both these findings show that respondents have experienced a change (or revival) of their Buddhist identity and that the building of the temple helped this development. The answer to research question 1 is therefore positive.

2. Is this potential change of religious attitudes or a personal religious revival connected to migration? Was this change or revival significantly motivated by the respondent's newly acquired status as a member of a national minority resulting from recent immigration?

Question number nine aimed to find who or what roused the respondent's interest in Buddhism. There were five choices to pick from: the development of their own life; family members; friend or acquaintance; a Buddhist community; or somebody else. While some respondents preferred more than one option (94 options were chosen altogether), it is clear that family generally had a significant influence (44 responses), as well as any existing Buddhist communities (20 responses). Only a small minority of respondents found the impulse that started or deepened their interest in Buddhism outside of the Vietnamese community: 18 mentioned the development of their own life and 9 a friend or acquaintance, amounting to 19 and 10% respectively. To summarise, the respondents' religious development was strongly motivated by the national minority environment, and there is a proven link between migration and religious revival.

Question 9 also explains the abovementioned tension between the "cultural" and "religious" motivation for temple building. We can admit that the initial reason for building temples was to strengthen the cultural identity of the younger generation of the Vietnamese community, as several temple leaders stated in the research preparation stage. This goal was achieved, and (at least some) members of the minority experienced a personal religious renewal and started seeing temples as places where they could practice the Buddhist religion. There is, therefore, no conflict between "cultural revival" and "religious revival". After all, the relatively high number of respondents who only visit the temple on holidays (31, meaning 39% in question 12) shows that the temple retains its cultural meaning alongside the religious meaning. Answers to question 11 show that 63% of respondents practice Buddhism in the temple at least once a month.

3. Has this potential change of religious attitudes resulted in the formation of a religious community? Are newcomers integrated into the community in a way that proves the existence of a local Buddhist community (sangha)?

In question 12, 14 respondents stated they visited the temple daily, 8 several times a week, 12 once weekly, and 11 once a month. Over half of the respondents visit the temple at least once a month (56%), while 31% only visit the temple on holidays. Since I decided that I would see the answer to the research questions in 3 as positive if more than two-thirds of respondents visited a Buddhist temple at least once a month, this criterion was not met. Not all of the respondents whose interest in Buddhism was renewed formed a Buddhist community – a sangha. The results suggest that local communities exist, but they are not composed of all those who became interested in Buddhism. In every temple that I acquired responses from, there are core groups of several Buddhists who take care of the temple and its activities. However, an appreciable part of the respondents only visits the temple on holidays, suggesting an interest more cultural than religious in nature, as mentioned in the previous paragraph.

The responses to question 13, which asked how often respondents attend Buddhist community events, support this conclusion. The results show that the respondents are very loyal to the community: over half of them (42) answered that they attended all events, while 43% attended irregularly. In summary, local sanghas (Buddhist communities) have been formed, but not all those whose religious attitudes have changed or been renewed belong to it. Individual Buddhists engage with the community on different levels, for example, because of a hectic work life – which is very common for members of the Vietnamese community, or because they are less interested in regular religious practice in the temple.

4. Is the revival in the Vietnamese community, which resulted in the building of temples, genuinely religious in nature? Can we say that temple visitors are Buddhists? Has this change of religious attitudes been accompanied by a conscious acceptance of values that can be called Buddhist and practice common for other Mahayana Buddhists?

Question 14 asks what being Buddhist means for the respondent, and the responses differ quite widely (as was expected with an open question). However, they do focus on three main topics: living according to Buddha's teachings (16 responses), following the five ethical rules⁴⁹ (18 responses), and do good deeds (14 responses explicitly, dozens of other answers are more specific: for example help others, strive for peace and harmony, practice compassion, etc.). The way the responses are formulated is often very devoted and Buddhist in nature (mentioning Buddha as an example), but they are stereotypical for some respondents. This does raise some doubts regarding their authenticity, but it may also be caused by the fact that the respondents filled the questionnaires out together. Responses often contain expressions and formulations typical for Mahayana Buddhism: frequent mentions of altruist motives of compassion and mercy, a reflection on global interconnectedness (care for the environment, peace, harmony, etc.). The responses show that a central goal of the respondents' religious life is helping other beings. On the other hand, nobody mentioned values such as wisdom and knowledge (only one case includes a positive statement about education), working towards achieving nirvana, personal spiritual advancement, supernatural abilities, coping with personal problems, etc., all of which are elements common in other Buddhist traditions.

Typical examples of responses were the following: "To have true faith. To have a kind soul that loves all people, animals, trees, and plants. Not being greedy. Living for other people in the whole world. My biggest wish is that there are no wars in the world and that everyone loves each other." (Cheb). "To help those in need and have compassion with everyone. A person who follows Buddha's teachings must obey the five Buddhist precepts. Always keeping Buddha's teachings in mind." (Cheb) "As a person from abroad, a person from a nation that needs to remember its roots,

⁴⁹ To abstain from taking life. To abstain from taking what is not given. To abstain from sensuous misconduct. To abstain from false speech. To abstain from intoxicants.

I turn to Buddha – every time I am in the temple, I feel very relaxed. It’s also important to do good deeds and respect one’s grandparents.” (Brno) “Finding spiritual forgiveness, striving for good in life, both for oneself and one’s family, friends, and society. Trying to be a compassionate, joyful person and not killing living beings.” (Brno) “Doing good deeds for other people, self-improvement. Praying for one’s family, grandparents, and all ancestors in the temple.” (Prague) “Cultivating oneself to become a better person according to Buddha’s teachings.” (Dubí) “I believe that Buddha’s teachings teach us compassion, peace, and education and help us be closer and love other people and help others. This helps us lead a good life.” (Brno)

The responses to the following question, which asked for a description of the respondents’ private Buddhist practice, also included having an interest in other people, following Buddha’s teachings, obeying the five precepts, and other ethical requirements. However, most of the responses naturally concerned religious practices: most frequently, the respondents mentioned prayer (36 responses, sometimes specified as a prayer for the sick, dead, etc.), listening to recorded sermons of monks (10), and less often also meditation (7). These responses also clearly showed that the Mahayana tradition of Chinese or Vietnamese Buddhism incorporates ancestor worship. Respondents explicitly mentioned it in five cases, and in other cases, they mentioned burning incense sticks, worshipping at their altars at home, etc.

Typical responses included the following: “I set out one hour per day so that I don’t forget Buddha’s teachings.” (Brno) “I always pray at home by the altar or in the temple or anywhere and anytime it is possible. I always try to follow Buddha’s teachings, forgive all evil, and not be greedy.” (Cheb) “Meditating, praying, performing ceremonies, listening to sermons.” (Brno) “I conduct a ceremony twice a month for my grandparent and family. When I have time, I go to the temple (I like going to the temple). When I am in the temple, I make the same sounds others are making.” (Dubí) “Praying every day, meditating, and listening to monks’ sermons on the Internet.” (Brno) “In the morning I pray to Buddha for 10 minutes and meditate 15–20 minutes, all at home. Twice to three times a week I go to the temple in the evening to pray with friends.” (Prague)

The last response is also connected to the following open question asking how the respondents are involved with the local community (full question: “Please state in which ways you are involved with the local Buddhist community”). Most frequently, respondents mentioned being involved by shared prayer (19 responses), listening to monks’ sermons together (16), celebrating holidays together (15), or trying to help those in need together (8). Several respondents (9) described their involvement as meeting with other Buddhists.

Examples of responses to this question include: “Attending all Buddhist holidays and temple activities.” (Brno) “Always taking part in different activities the community organises and trying to help as much as I can.” (Cheb) “Helping with preparation at all Buddhist events, listening to sermons.” (Dubí) “I go to the temple whenever I can. I pass Buddha’s teachings on to my children and grandchildren.” (Dubí) “There is a temple where we live, and Buddhists come here every Sunday to gather. Every year,

there are big holidays, and we all try to help. During every holiday, many Buddhists gather here.” (Brno)

The responses to all three open questions help us answer the 4th research question and conclude that the Vietnamese Buddhist community in the Czech Republic engages in authentic Mahayana Buddhism. The responses prove that temple visitors are aware of Buddha’s teachings and the values that Mahayana Buddhism promotes and that some of them form a community that corresponds to a true Buddhist sangha.

8. Conclusion

My interpretation of the data presented in the first part of the paper and of the research results is as follows:

1. The Vietnamese minority in the Czech Republic has experienced a marked religious revival in the tradition of Mahayana Buddhism in the last decade. This religion has “returned” to individuals’ personal lives and public space to a significant extent. However, since this is a case of a so-called ethnic Buddhism, this public space is limited only to places frequented by members of this ethnic group.

2. This revival took place in an immigrant minority, and it was initiated by the minority, without any influence from the majority. Members of this minority formed local Buddhist communities (sanghas). Different Buddhists engage with these on a differing level, but the communities are viable. This viability of local sanghas is proven by their ability to raise the necessary funds to build and maintain temples.

3. The religious revival was no doubt initially intended to help maintain and develop the ethnic culture of the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic and thus strengthen the ethnic identity of its members. However, temples and local Buddhist communities are unquestionably manifestations of authentic Mahayana Buddhism modified to fit the Czech environment rather than merely cultural or folklore phenomena. The religious practise exists in the context of Czech society, which has not encountered it before, and it is therefore evident that Vietnamese Buddhists in the Czech Republic have undergone a transformation from the cultural aspects of Buddhism to the religious ones.

4. The revival gave rise to so-called ethnic Buddhist communities in the Czech Republic, meaning inwards-oriented communities within an ethnic minority that maintain only minimal communication with the majority and its institutions. However, this compact nature of the Vietnamese Buddhist community does not necessarily mean a unified organisation. Quite the contrary, typical features of Vietnamese Buddhism in the Czech Republic are that individual communities are independent, there is no generally accepted leadership, and communication between the communities is limited. When trying to register with the Ministry of Culture, the communities attempted to collaborate to a greater degree, but this effort had no long-term results.

The research presented in this paper is the first of its kind for the Vietnamese minority in the Czech Republic. We can hope that data collection will become easier for

future studies, as the Vietnamese community presumably becomes more integrated. The future study into Christianity will provide a more comprehensive picture of the religious life of the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “Databáze výsledků ze Sčítání lidu, domů a bytů k 26. 3. 2011” [“Database of results from the census on 26 March 2011”] [online], Praha: Český statistický úřad [Czech Statistical Office] 2012, accessed 15 December 2018, available online at <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/home>.
- “Press Statement on the visit to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief” [online], *The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN)*, 31 July 2014, accessed 31 August 2017, available online at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14914&LangID=E>.
- CONZE, EDWARD, *Stručné dějiny buddhismu [A Short History of Buddhism]*, Brno: Jota 1997, 239 p.
- FREIDINGEROVÁ, TEREZA, *Vietnamci v Česku a ve světě [The Vietnamese in the Czech Republic and the World]*, Praha: Slon 2014, 232 p.
- HLAVATÁ, LUCIE, JÁN IČO, PETRA KARLOVÁ, and MÁRIA STRAŠÁKOVÁ, *Dějiny Vietnamu [The History of Vietnam]*, Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2008, 552 p.
- HONZÍK, JAN, *Jednota v rozmanitosti: Buddhismus v České republice [Unity in diversity: Buddhism in the Czech Republic]*, Praha: DharmaGaia 2010, 263 p.
- IČO, JÁN, *Náboženství ve Vietnamu [Religion in Vietnam]*, Praha: Muzeum hlavního města Prahy 2010, 232 p.
- JIRKOVÁ, BARBORA, “Spiritualita Vietnamců u nás” [“Spirituality of the Vietnamese in the Czech Republic”], *Dingir* 15 (1, 2012): p. 19.
- KOCOUREK, JIŘÍ, “Vietnamci v České republice” [“The Vietnamese in the Czech Republic”], in: TATJANA ŠIŠKOVÁ (ed.), *Mensiny a migranti v České republice [Minorities and Migrants in the Czech Republic]*, Praha: Portál 2001, p. 99–105.
- MARTÍNKOVÁ, ŠÁRKA, *Vietnamská komunita v Praze [The Vietnamese Community in Prague]*, Praha: Muzeum hlavního města Prahy 2010, 46 p.
- PREBISH, CHARLES S., “Reflections on the Transmission of Buddhism to America”, in: JACOB NEEDLEMAN and GEORGE BAKER (eds.), *Understanding the New Religions*, New York: Seabury 1978, p. 153–172.
- PREBISH, CHARLES S., “Two Buddhisms Reconsidered”, *Buddhist Studies Review* 10 (2, 1993): 187–206.
- SOUCY, ALEXANDER, “Reappraisal of Vietnamese Buddhism’s Status as ‘Ethnic’”, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 12 (2, 2017): 20–48.
- TRUITT, ALLISON, “Quán Thế Âm of the Transpacific”, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 12 (2, 2017): 83–107.
- VOJTÍŠEK, ZDENĚK, and PAVEL HOŠEK, “Vietnamský Vesak” [Vietnamese Vesak], *Dingir* 14 (2, 2011): 41.