

Associate Professor LE Hoang Anh Thu

Buddhist Charitable Practice, Old-Age Experience and Personhood of Vietnamese Elderly



My research examines Buddhist charitable activities that are widely participated by senior citizens in Vietnam and explores how Vietnamese elderly's everyday experience of being old is shaped during their interactions with society through Buddhist benevolent work.

This research seeks to understand how Buddhist charitable work defines Vietnamese people's social experience of being old and enables them to cope with various realities of old age, such as loss of social roles and physical decline.

The context of this research is Vietnamese population's rapid ageing due to lower birth-rate and longer life expectancy. Vietnamese elderly (defined as those above 60 years old by the Vietnamese government) accounts for more than 10 percent of its population in 2017. By exploring Vietnamese elderly's Buddhist social practice, this research hopes to gain insight into the experience of being old in Vietnam's rapidly changing society.



A Buddhist practitioner distributing gifts to rural kids at a school in a Southern Vietnam province.



Buddhist practitioners sorting out gifts for people with leprosy in a lepers' village in a Southern Vietnam province.

To collect data for this research, I have conducted field research among charity givers and organizers in southern Vietnam. I have joined my informants in their charity events in hospitals, lepers' colonies and rural villages inside and outside of Ho Chi Minh City. I have participated in the various stages of my informants' charitable activities, from planning, fund raising, contacting local authorities and recipients and travelling to rural villages. Although the research is still ongoing, the field data I have collected so far highlights the connection between charitable activities and senior-aged charity-givers' sense of self-worth, social belonging and status.


This research aims to be a valuable resource for policy makers and welfare providers in providing senior citizens with necessary facilities, support and opportunities to construct meaningful old-age experience.



Professor Le guarding the charity lunch boxes on a vehicle on the way to a hospital.



Professor Le's informants distributing charity lunch boxes in front of a hospital.

 **College of Affiliation**

College of Asia Pacific Studies

 **Research Field**

Cultural Anthropology,
Folklore Studies