Mindful Leadership – A Phenomenological Study of Vietnamese Buddhist Monks in America with Respect to their Spiritual Leadership Roles and Contributions to Society

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Abstract

Mindful Leadership – A Phenomenological Study of Vietnamese Buddhist Monks in America with Respect to their Spiritual Leadership Roles and Contributions to Society

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The lack of a spiritual dimension (moral and ethical) in leadership, which frames the development of moral value—from business and politics to family and education—has become a key factor contributing to negative consequences caused by unethical leaders. Both Eastern and Western society also lack an in-depth understanding of how the spiritual leadership practices of Vietnamese Buddhist monks might/may be models of moral and ethical leadership for others in the larger society. This qualitative research study utilizes a phenomenological approach to learn how to apply the leadership lessons derived from the lived experience of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in contemporary America.

The study is composed of historical and contemporary literature, empirical research on relevant leadership theories, on Buddhist values (especially those of mindfulness and compassion as part of their daily routine). In order to have a peaceful way of life, to help and lead others, Vietnamese monks learn from their masters, practice their learned core values and utilize Zen practices.

The researcher interviewed 14 Buddhist monks across United States of America by snowball effect sampling and the three main themes emerging from the research are as follows: (a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America and their lived-experiences are dynamic, unique and contributing to the society within their spiritual leadership roles and obligations; (b) Their leadership style is characterized as authentically leading by example by basing decisions upon the core values of mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom; and (c) Through their practices, their presence, and their contributions to the welfare of others, they bring about peace of mind and happiness for themselves and for others in society.

The findings were extracted from participants, resulting in the five principles of a mindful leadership. The five leadership strategies discussed include: Leading from the Inside Out, the Notion of Daily Practice, Leading-by-Example, Congruence, and the Notion of Completeness. Eleven recommendations emerged from this phenomenological study with eight being the techniques and strategies to achieve mindfulness, peace, compassion, and happiness and the remaining three being dedicated for further studies.

Keywords:
Buddhism, Buddhist, Buddhist values, compassion, Dharma, leadership practices, leadership styles, leadership theories, meditation, mindful leadership, mindfulness, phenomenological study, phenomenology, spiritual leadership, Vietnamese Buddhism, Vietnamese Buddhist monks, wisdom, Zen practices, Zen.
This Ed.D. Dissertation Committee from The School of Education at Drexel University certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Mindful Leadership – A Phenomenological Study of Vietnamese Buddhist Monks in America with Respect to their Spiritual Leadership Roles and Contributions to Society

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Date
Dedications

To those who walk in mindfulness and the teachers who guide them
To my beloved and extended family, without whom this level of education would have been unachievable

To my homelands: Vietnam and America
To my community and Buddhist family

To my parents, Long Xuan Bach and Ai Thi Tran
To my wonderful wife, Trang Thanh Nguyen
To my beautiful children: Khang Xuan Bach and Kiet Thanh Bach
Leading by Example Leadership

(A leadership poem resulting from my own meditation and reflecting upon spiritual leadership)

Leadership,
any leadership model must have guidelines.
Set solid principles and objectives,
then create the standard of excellence.

Leading by Example
is the foundation of life and leadership,
for others to follow
and inspire,
to have a shared common vision,
with abundant enthusiasm and action.

There are many different paths
to our ultimate goals,
but these paths must be built on
the foundation of compassion, wisdom and courage.

We must envision the future,
create a practical ideal,
consider the potential uniqueness of the organization,
persuade and take quiet action
for all to see and follow.

An exciting and wonderful future.
We must take the challenge,
and look for innovative ways
to improve our organization.

Experiment, take risks,
and learn from the mistakes and failures.

They present opportunities for growth
and transformation.

For a better future
we must take action,
promote and support each other.

Cooperation and collaboration for sustainable change.

Positivity,
mutual respect and unity
are all so precious,
like the rhythm of the heart.

Extraordinary effort,
inner values and human dignity
are the key.

my dear mindfulness practitioners and friends.

Hard work is ahead,
our hopes and dreams
will come true
when we live for the greater good,
and when we contribute to the development of humanity
with great understanding and love,
tolerance and forgiveness.
Acknowledgments

Lao Tzu is credited with saying, “A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.” In the West, we understand that such a journey also has a final step, that just as it has a beginning, so it has an end. In the East, however, especially so in Buddhism, we are presented with the equally valid condition that such journeys are never-ending and so never-beginning, but always somehow in process. The process of research which was begun and is now nearing an end occupies both cultural realities. I know that the true beginning of this journey was not when I made the decision to pursue it many long months ago, nor will it end with the awarding of a doctoral degree. Being a man of two cultures, a man of the East and of the West, my journey has always been far larger and wider ranging than this current path along that greater way. I personally and profoundly would like to thank many people who make this educational goal possible. First and foremost, to my parents Bach Xuan Long and Tran Thị Ai, without their continued encouragement, unconditional love, sincere caring, hugs and kisses, without them, this doctoral degree would be impossible. Secondly, a special thank you to our parents-in-law, Mr. Nguyễn Thanh Minh and Mrs. Lê Thị Can for their encouragement, support and caring. To all of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks, who took the time to let me interview them in this research and taught me directly or indirectly over the years. They also helped and supported me throughout this journey; they are: Most Venerable Thích Thangs Hoan, Most Venerable Thích Tịnh Tự, Most Venerable Thích Minh Đạt, Most Venerable Thích Thái Siêu, Most Venerable Thích Nguyễn Siêu, Venerable Thích Hạnh Tuấn, Venerable Thích Minh Dung, Venerable Thích Từ Lực, Venerable Thích Minh Thiện, Venerable Thích Tự Giác, Venerable Thích Thiện Duyên, Venerable Thích Pháp Chơn,
Venerable Thích Đạo Quang, and Venerable Thích Tịnh Mạn. Your wisdom, practice, insight and words of encouragement are greatly appreciated. I also would like to single out Venerable Thích Thiện Duyên, the Abbot of Kim Quang Buddhist temple, and Venerable Thích Đạo Quang for being there whenever I needed their support and friendship as well as Đạo tràng Chùa Kim Quang for their open-arms and open-hearts.

To all of my sisters and brothers: Chị Đồ, anh chị Hằng Lô, anh chị Chính Gành, anh chị Hiếu Phương, anh Bạch Xuân Thảo, anh chị Vĩnh Hoa, anh chị Minh Xoa, anh chị Tấn Hồng, anh chị Thái Nhàn, các em Tự Ngà, Tiến Xuyên, và Hải Hiệu to whom I wrote the following email right before I went back to school:

My dear brothers and sisters,

I have been thinking for the last few days and I decided to email you all. First of all, I just want to let you know how lucky we’re to be in the same family. Everyone has been nothing less than dynamics and amazing. Personally, we appreciated your love, your friendship, your support and your kindness. We thank you very much.

At this point, I just want to let you know that I have been accepted into a doctoral program at Drexel University in education. It takes about 3-3 1/2yrs and $57,600 or so to finish, which is the same price as at CSUS. However, based upon my educational backgrounds and accomplishments, Drexel offered me two fellowships: (1) Sacramento Leadership Fellowship and (2) Papadakis Public Service Fellowship which added up to about 25% discount of the above amount.

I am thinking about it and I'll need all of the support that I can get from all of you, especially Trang. I told her that I would NOT go back to school without her support. As you already know, I am lucky to have such a loving and caring wife. Trang is amazing and supportive. She is the source of our joy, our hope, and our happiness.

As for my ambition, I just wanted to accomplish...

And I followed up with this email.

My dear brothers and sisters,

After many days of much thinking and discussions, we came up with our decision and I would like to let all of you know about it.

First and foremost, personally, I really appreciated all of your advices, insights, and encouraging words either in person, via phone or email. Because of us, you guys had to spend so much energy and thoughts from the "sleepless night in Sacramento" to heated discussions; from grateful words to stimulating insights, from tears of joy to emotional support. For that, we thank you.

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With ease and an excited heart, I am going back to school with Trang’s love and support. Intuitively, Trang knew that it is my joy and our happiness for me to go back to school. But she is also concerned about the time commitment that I will have for the family. I ensured her that I would spend more quality time with our family and cut back on others. After six months of testing out the "water" from April to October, if the "condition" is NOT met, then I’ll be grounded.

Regardless of what happens, I’ll always keep learning new things, as I always believe an educator is a life-long learner. Again, thank you so much for your time and support.

With love,

Along the way, some of the conditions were not met, but with wonderful Trang’s love, support and forgiveness, I was able to continue and I am writing this to thank all of you, my sisters and brothers, from the bottom of my heart. Your support and encouragement is greatly valued and appreciated. Out of all the sisters and brothers, I also would like to personally thank my sister Phuong Bach, who has been my role model since childhood, for always encouraging me and helping me in every way imaginable; and to my brother-in-law, Thai Pham, for helping with the financial investment (whether it is a tax or a gift, I value your heart and your help and will be always thankful for all you have done for me).

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

Whether or not the twenty-first century becomes a century of spirituality depends on our capacity of building community. Without a community, we will become victims of despair. We need each other. We need to congregate, to bring together our wisdom, our insight, and our compassion. Thich Nhat Hanh

The 21\textsuperscript{st} century shows trends of moral decline within the ranks of leadership, be that public or private. Ludwig and Longenecker (1993) identified this moral decline with ethical failures among leaders, encompassing decision making, the taking of action, and the formulation and implementation of policy. According to Price (2000), the notion of the ethical failure of leadership “unfortunately is true across [the] leadership context – in public, private, and non-profit sectors” (p. 177). With public and private interests at risk in this climate of moral decline among those in leadership positions, a resilient, mindful paradigm is not only inherently vital, but also capable of being transformative for society as a whole. Recent studies by Kabat-Zinn (2003), Davidson et al. (2003), Ludwig and Kabat-Zinn (2008), Kabat-Zinn (1999), Baer and Ebrary (2006), and Goleman (2003) suggest that meditative and mindfulness practices play vital roles and have a positive impact in medicine and in the corporate environment. Furthermore, Dhiman (2008) suggested mindfulness has tremendous potential in enhancing workplace well-being through improved communications, efficient meetings, optimum performance, better decisions, and greater understanding.

A new habit of mind, a secular approach, and a solid measureable action of spiritual leadership may benefit organizations, governments, and education. A spiritual emphasis influences leadership in different ways: (a) in leading by example – as a fundamental foundation and/or motivation, (b) in practicing mindfulness – shaping
leadership beliefs and values, (c) in cultivating compassion and loving-kindness – with an emphasis on justice, and (d) in sharing merit – nurturing relationships rather than highlighting individuals (Thich, M.-D., 2011). This research lays a foundation for understanding, from a Buddhist perspective, how a mindful leadership or spiritual leadership model can result in more mindful and harmonious leadership that will in turn result in a more ethical context within which to enhance family, organization, political, and educational outcomes for all.

**Statement of the Problem to be Researched**

We lack an in-depth understanding of how the spiritual leadership practices of Vietnamese Buddhist monks might/may be models of moral and ethical leadership for others in the larger society.

**Purpose and Significance of the Problem**

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to understand how spiritual leadership practices of Vietnamese Buddhist monks might/may be models of moral and ethical leadership for others in the larger society. It explored the phenomenon of the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in their spiritual and leadership positions. The study was also designed to identify how, through the essence of these experiences, Buddhist spiritual values and practices may be woven into the daily lives of others in the greater society.

This study focused on three key elements: (a) the limited research on the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks and thus the limited understanding of the living experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in their leadership roles, (b) the
contribution of useful information about different approaches to leadership, and 3) the contribution of the knowledge of how religious leaders perceive their spiritual leadership roles. Potentially, this research could contribute toward the development of a new model of leadership to foster change in individuals, families, and organizations for the greater good.

**Significance of the Problem**

In the 21st century, people appear to be “heading outward” rather than focusing on their inner lives. Consumed with running errands, devising and completing work-related tasks, dreaming of that better house or faster car, they are distracted by the temptations of material gains rather than concerned about the sensations of spiritual rewards and inner peace. The mass media tend to favor reports of individuals making dubious moral and ethical decisions that not only affect themselves, but those around them. This lack of the spiritual dimension—from the individual to the larger community, from public schools to financial institutions, from corporate interest groups to the politicians who ultimately make policy—has become a major factor contributing to a lack of ethical action by our leaders. Furthermore, recent studies, such as those by Bowen and Heath (2005) and McDaniel (2004) found that many corporate sectors collapsed due to the lack of moral and ethical values in the decision-making process.

Taking the time to reflect on actions and thereby begin to understand the impact of leadership on the greater good (in the larger society) seems to be severely lacking. The practice of mindfulness, fully being present in the here and now, is therefore needed to make more mindful decisions. Buddhism, Zen, mindfulness, and Buddhist monks are no longer strange to the American mainstream culture. According to Gontovnick (2000),
Gregory (2001), Gvosdev (2002), Asian immigrants conveyed Buddhism to America’s shores as early as the 18th century. According to Fong (1998), Asians came to America for many reasons such as the need to emigrate from socially or politically insecure homelands, for financial opportunities abroad that offered the chance of helping them provide for their families back home, for military service abroad, and sometimes for the simple need to reunite with family. Chiefly, though, most immigrants came because of the aforementioned political and economic factors in their own countries. Chinese shipbuilders came to Baja California as early as 1571 as well as during the “1868 Burlingame Treaty, which recognized ‘free migration and emigration’ of Chinese to the United States in exchange for American trade privileges in China” (p. 11). Many of these immigrants were Buddhists. Furthermore, according to Asai and Williams (1999), Japanese Buddhists arrived in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1913. In addition, Thich Quang Minh (2007) determined that Vietnamese Buddhists arrived in the United States in the late 1950s, and their numbers grew rapidly through the many waves of political and economic refugees after the Vietnam War ended on April 30, 1975.

Thich Quang Minh (2007) and Nguyen (2008) suggested Vietnamese Buddhist monks, such as Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh and Thich Thien An, brought mindfulness meditation, Engaged Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism, and Mahayana traditions to American soil in the 1960s. These practices and traditions are beneficial to the Buddhist practitioners and communities at large. In the West, many authors like Carlson and Garland (2005), Kabat-Zinn (1990), and Wingard (2005) have suggested the positive benefits of practicing Buddhism and mindfulness in both the workplace and in the medical field. Research on mindfulness and meditation along with many Buddhist
principles and values are the keystone of the work by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a Professor Emeritus of Medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, Massachusetts, who many suggest is the father of Mindfulness-Based Stress-Reduction (MBSR). Kabat-Zinn’s life is dedicated to bringing mindfulness to medicine and beyond (Gazella, 2005). Thich Quang Minh (2007) also suggested the Vietnamese were able to draw upon their Buddhist beliefs and values to support their adapting to, interacting with, and assimilating into the American mainstream culture. These immigrants and first-generation Americans have made great strides. Although they had a great number of obstacles, they also managed to adapt, assimilate, and contribute while keeping their distinctive Vietnamese Buddhist ethics and virtues. Thich Quang Minh (2007) concluded that Vietnamese immigrants have persevered and flourished by drawing upon their unique Vietnamese Buddhist heritage, while contributing positively to the cultural and spiritual needs of the Vietnamese and established communities in America.

This study examined the phenomenon of the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in their spiritual and leadership positions. While Love (2008) indicated, “Some qualitative research exists about religious figures in leadership roles (as cited in Capper, 2000; Nwachukwu, 2005; Santee, 2006) and the path of Buddhists in leadership roles” (as cited in Scharmer, 1999, p. 6), research that studies the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in their spiritual leadership roles is very limited. The researcher, therefore, has sought to understand how the essence of their practices may positively impact individual, corporate, institutional, political, and educational leadership scenarios by pursuing the phenomenon of experiences of a random selected group of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks in their spiritual leadership roles and contributions.
Research Questions Focused on Solution Finding

Since this was a qualitative research study employing a phenomenological approach, the following research questions sought to provide an “understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 14):

1. What are the essences of the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in spiritual leadership roles?
2. How do they describe their ethical and spiritual practices as spiritual leaders?
3. How do Vietnamese Buddhist monks perceive their roles in encouraging a spiritual life for those in leadership roles so they can effectively lead others?

The Conceptual Framework

Researcher's Stances and Experiential Base

I was born and raised in a small coastal village called Nhon Ly, Quy Nhon in the Binh Dinh province of Vietnam. My family and I came to this country in the summer of 1991 under the “Amerasian Homecoming Act” championed by Arizona senator John McCain, a former prisoner of war during the Vietnam conflict. My adoptive brother, Thao Bach, is an Amerasian whose father was an American soldier serving in Vietnam before 1976 (United States General Accounting Office, 1994).

My family and I settled in Lincoln, Nebraska – the heartland of America. Language, culture, and religious barriers were challenging hurdles I overcame. Starting at Lincoln High School and then attending the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, people kept asking me, “Where are you from?” and “What is your religion?” I told them I was
(and still am) from Vietnam and I was (and still am) a Buddhist. My parents were (and remain) Buddhists, though at the time I did not really know very much about being a Buddhist. This left me feeling uneasy and motivated me to find out more about it. The more I researched and practiced Buddhism, the more engaged I became and my life became better and more meaningful each day. It was a way of life for which I searched – a peaceful and equanimous path filled with compassion, wisdom, and courage.

“Compassion-Wisdom-Courage” is the motto of the Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Association in which I am actively involved (both at different levels and in various leadership capacities). After my post-graduate programs at the University of California, Davis in Bio-organic Chemistry and at California State University, Sacramento in Educational Leadership and Policies, I went back to school for my doctoral degree at Drexel University in Educational Leadership and Management. During my early months of research, I found there is seemingly unlimited information on education and educational leadership, which I am currently living and practicing. Yet, there was limited research on Eastern leadership styles, and especially on that of Vietnamese Buddhist monks (Nguyen, 2006, 2007; Thich, Q., 2007), with the exception of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, his Engaged Buddhism movement and mindfulness meditation, and Zen Master Thich Thien An (Digby, 2010; Thich, Q., 2007).

As an educator and a Buddhist practitioner, I found some success in bringing mindfulness concepts into the educational setting through the Buddhist youth associations, my personal life and volunteering in a maximum-security prison. In addition, at Kim Quang Buddhist Temple in Sacramento, where I am a board member, I constantly find ways for improvement as an individual, as an educator, and as a
contributor in our society. During this research journey, I was able to “bracket out” or suspend my own judgment and understanding during the study. Moustakas (1994) referred to “epoche or understandings, judgments and knowings are set aside and the phenomena are revisited” (p. 33). Personally, I believe studying the phenomenon of lived-experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks may be a humble contribution to American Buddhism, Vietnamese Buddhism in America, and our educational settings. The landscape, soundscape, and imaginative approaches to mindfulness and leadership will enrich American Buddhism and society at large. My research stance (see Figure 1) is based upon the foundation of compassion and wisdom with a hope to enhance leadership styles – leading-from-the-heart and leading-by-example – to benefit individuals and families, schools, businesses, educational organizations, and other institutions.
In this research journey, I took the ontological and epistemological perspectives (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1988). These approaches mean I am using my own experiences, my own being, becoming, and existence as well as my knowledge and understanding as a catalyst to move the research forward. My philosophy is based on my own experiences and on the belief that reality is subjective to each and every participant. In my view, different individuals may experience the same phenomena in different ways. To look at different situations or circumstances for a completed picture, one must do so in different views and perspectives. This holistic approach is essential in any leadership position. Furthermore, as an epistemological perspective, reflexivity (spontaneous) is encouraged to recognize the researcher’s interpretation along with the participants’.
also use the lens of a symbolic interactionism. Herman-Kinney and Reynolds (2003) noted that it focuses on the investigation of the patterns of communication, understanding, and adjustment of each individual and amongst individuals. The framework for understanding how we interact results from the meaning of symbols as well as verbal and nonverbal communication we use each day.

Moreover, the framework for understanding is a theoretical perspective derived from practicality that assumes people construct selves, society, and reality through interaction and positive contribution. From these perspectives, this research was examined through a social constructivist lens (Creswell, 2003; Schwandt, 2001). As a social constructivist, I am seeing multiple realities and sought to understand the knowledge and wisdom of Vietnamese Buddhist monks by gathering artifacts, conducting interviews, and making observations to build meaning that can be shared with others. This process of understanding the lived experiences is the foundation of social constructivism, the pedagogical approach/force that pushed me forward. With my educational background and experience as an educator, a researcher, a Buddhist practitioner, a thinker, and an optimist, my research went well on this phenomenological study journey.

**Conceptual Framework of Three Research Streams**

The research has three main research streams: (a) Buddhism and mindfulness, (b) Spirituality and leadership, and (c) Moral and ethical leadership (see Figure 2). It is composed of historical, recent, and current literature and empirical research on relevant leadership theories on Buddhist values, such as mindfulness and compassion. To date, the literature review yielded limited research pertaining to Vietnamese Buddhist monks
who currently hold spiritual and leadership roles. The literature review presents past, modern, and present literature on Buddhism and empirical literature and research on mindfulness as well as the vital role mindfulness plays in the health, care, and well-being in this prevailing society. In addition, literature related to spirituality and leadership was revealed to explain and recognize the ethical and spiritual practices of spiritual leaders. Finally, a literature review of moral and ethical leadership is discussed to help clarify how Vietnamese Buddhist monks perceive their roles in encouraging a spiritual life for those in leadership roles so they can effectively lead others.

Figure 2. A conceptual framework of my study.

**Buddhism and mindfulness.** Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in the world and in America. It has many core values, such as compassion, mindfulness, and
transformation. The literature stream reviews a historical aspect of Buddhism and modern research on mindfulness. According to Rahula (1974), Prince Siddhartha Gotama was the founder of Buddhism at the age of 35. There were many rules and precepts, including being mindful, that can be applied in the present day. Today, the five mindfulness trainings in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, adapted from the five ancient precepts of Buddha’s time (2636 years ago), are the foundation for the practice of Buddhism (Rahula 1974; Thich, H. N., 1993, 2011).

Mindfulness, even though it can be traced back to Buddhist practices and many ancient religious traditions, is examined in the historical perspective and in the contemporary clinical inquiry. According to Thich Nhat Hanh (2011, 2013), mindfulness is, first of all, the energy that helps you recognize the conditions of happiness. Anyone can help remind us that we can have happiness right here, right now. It is “the kind of energy that can help you to go home to yourself, to be in the here and the now, so that you know what to do and what not to do in order to preserve yourself, to build your true home, to transform your afflictions, and to be a home for other people” (p. 117). Kabat-Zinn defined mindfulness as “moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness. It is cultivated attention in a particular way, namely, on purpose in the present moment—and, I emphasize, non-judgmentally” (as cited in Gazella, 2005, p. 60).

Kabat-Zinn (1990) takes mindfulness a step further into the Western clinical settings with the mindfulness-based stress reduction programs (MBSR). Kabat-Zinn (1990) and Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) also reveal that mindfulness-based interventions enhance improvements in self-awareness and chronic illness conditions as well as promote well-being generally. Additionally, Martins (2012) found that the older
adults who participated in MBSR acquired mindfulness abilities, such as self-compassion, presence, and attentiveness and were affected in terms of their perceptions of their lives, aging, death, and loss. As Gazella (2005) pointed out of MBSR and other mindfulness-based interventions, “the imaginative approaches that are being taken and researched are truly inspiring, and bode well for a more mindful and more heartful medicine and healthcare in the future” (p. 64).

**Spirituality and leadership.** In most contexts, spirituality is the basis for a balanced and successful life. According to the Dalai Lama (1999), spirituality enhances the “qualities of the human spirit that bring happiness to both self and others” (p. 22). Spirituality is the push factor or the intrinsic motivation for leaders to do “good” for their organizations. Becker (2009) mentions that moral principles, as well as a solid vision, for a good life are essential. This is what Scharmer (2007); Senge, Scharmer, Jaworshi, and Flowers (2004); and Wall and Arden (1990) called the power of wisdom or the presence of inner peace. Ultimately, it leads to spiritual leadership (DuPree, 1989; Etzioni, 1993; Fairholm, 1997; Greenleaf, 1977; Kiefer, 1992). In addition, the notion of leadership is playing the role of influencing people’s minds and actions. As Heifetz and Linksy (2002) and Wheatley (2005) pointed out, spirituality and spiritual development are evolving as one of the fundamental aspects of human growth and well-being.

**Moral and ethical leadership.** Moral and ethical leadership is the fabric of our society if it is fundamental, transformative, and enthusiastic. As Burns (1978) pointed out, both leaders and followers help and hold each other to the higher level of morality and enthusiasm. Or as Yukl (2006) put it, to achieve a shared common purpose, leaders and followers are engaging, motivating, and inspiring each other for what is best for the
organization. To do so, leaders must make adjustments or utilize resources effectively, be creative, and empower others (Bennis, 1993). However, it must start with service. According to Greenleaf (1995), servant leadership – servant as leader – is the essence and nuance of moral leadership. Leaders predominantly serve others with dignity that embeds the values of listening, empathy, and awareness; it is the foundation of moral and ethical leadership.

**Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are provided to provide further clarity in the context of this study.

**Abbot**

Refers to anyone who took full-ordination. It is the title for the person who is head of a Buddhist temple, monastery, and/or convent.

**Buddha**

Means "the Enlightened One" or "Awakened One." The term is also used as a title for Prince Siddhartha Gautama, who first became awakened in India more than 2,500 years ago.

**Bodhisattva**

Refers to anyone who has great compassion and a wish to attain the Buddhahood to benefit of all sentient beings.

**Buddhism**

According to the Pew Research Center, in 2010, there were about 488 million Buddhists worldwide, representing 7% of the world’s total population and 1.2% of the US population. Buddhism refers to a religion and/or a way of life that
consists of a variety of traditions, values, beliefs, and practices, principally based on the teachings of the Buddha, or the "Awakened One," a title given to Prince Siddhartha Gautama after his enlightenment. The central teachings of Buddha Gautama are the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. The core principles of practicing Buddhism can be shortened to: cultivate good deeds, refrain from evil ones, keep the mind clean. This is the teaching of the Buddha (Dhammapada Sutra). Buddhism has two main traditions: Mahayana and Theravada, which will be defined below along with other terms.

**Buddhist Mahayana Tradition**

Mahayana literally means “great vehicle.” Mahayana Buddhism does not adhere strictly to the Buddha’s original words. It is found throughout Asia in countries such as China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and Vietnam. It emphasizes that one can seek salvation through the intervention of other superior beings, called Bodhisattvas. Mahayana Buddhism became the dominant form of Buddhism in China, Korea, Japan, and Mongolia (Lopez, 2001). The Vajrayana (Tibetan) tradition is practiced mostly in Tibet and Mongolia and is a part of the Mahayana tradition. Other Mahayana traditions include Pure Land, Zen, Nichiren Buddhism, Hòa Hảo Buddhism, and Shingon.

**Buddhist Theravada Tradition**

This is the original form of Buddhism and is often more conservative. Theravada means “the way of the elders” in Pali; it preserves Buddhism in its original form. Theravada Buddhism is the main religion of many countries in Southeast Asia, such as Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia (Lopez, 2001).
Vietnam also carries this tradition along with the modified form, Khất Sỹ (Khat-Sy) Buddhism.

**Engaged Buddhism**

It is a branch of Buddhism founded by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh in the early 1960s that uses the application of meditation practice and Dharma teachings as “a way of life and a spiritual practice that works actively in the world to relieve suffering” (Deer Park Monastery, 2014, para. 9).

**Meditation**

According to Gunaratana, B., & Gunaratana, H. (2011), “Meditation is intended to purify the mind… It brings the mind to a state of tranquility and awareness, a state of concentration and insight (p. 8).

**Middle Way**

Middle Way refers to the middle, moderate way of life between sensual pleasures and self-mortification. The course of life consists of Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration (Phrabhavanaviriyakhun, 2002).

**Mindfulness**

As defined by Thich Nhat Hanh (2014), mindfulness is the energy of being aware and awake to the present moment. It is the continuous practice of touching life deeply in every moment of daily life. To be mindful is to be truly alive, present, and at one with those around you and with what you are doing. We bring our body and mind into harmony while we wash the dishes, drive the car or take our morning shower. (para. 1)
Most Venerable

Based upon the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, that title refers to anyone at least 60 years old in life and 40 years in full-ordination.

Novice monk

Based upon the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, it refers to anyone who comes to the temple aspiring to become a monk and yet taking full-ordination.

Ordained

Refers to any person who takes full-ordination or takes the Bodhisattva of 250 precepts for monks (male) and 348 precepts for nuns (female).

Phenomenology

Moustakas (1994) defined it as the empirical phenomenological approach involving “a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (p. 13).

Spirituality

Schneider (2006) defined spirituality as “the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives” (p. 166).

Temple

Refers to a place of worship for the whole community found mainly in urban areas and that offers a variety of services to laypeople.
Ullambana (or Lễ Vu Lan in Vietnamese)

The day to honor parents and pray for the deceased. It is on the last full moon of the third month (usually August) of the annual retreat of monastic.

Venerable

Based upon the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, that title refers to anyone at least 40 years old in life and 20 years in full-ordination.

Vietnamese Monk

A male person with a last name of Thích or Thich (Sakya), who has been ordained as a monk and practices in one of the Vietnamese Buddhism schools.

Zen

Zen or Thiền in Vietnamese is a school of Mahayana Buddhism tradition. Buksbazen (2002) defined Zen as “a way of seeing clearly who we are and what our life is, and a way of living based on that clear vision” (p. 15).

Zen Center

Buddhist temple found largely in urban areas with an emphasis on teaching and learning.

Zen Monastery

Buddhist practice center for monks that is often located in rural settings with an emphasis on learning and practicing.

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

This phenomenological research makes six foundational assumptions. First, the world is intertwined and very complex, yet it has specific and unique patterns that can be
learned and understood. Such is congruent with the researcher’s view of symbolic interactionism, which emphasizes the investigation of the patterns of communication, understanding, and adjustment of different individuals. Second, the participants, the spirited and spiritual leaders – Vietnamese Buddhist monks – were able to read Vietnamese and/or English and could understand and answer as well as interpret the questions properly. They were born and raised in Vietnam and/or in America and were bilingual. Third, the participants were able to understand and give honest responses to the semi-structured interview and focus group questions. (“Do not lie” is one of the conducts/precepts to which they are committed as Buddhist monks.) Fourth, 14 participants is significant and essential to formulate an understanding of the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist Monks. Fifth, a participation of approximately 15 individuals is a good representation of this research population. (According to Thich Quang Minh [2007], in the 300 temples located in the United States, only about 100 monks assume leadership roles or hold the title of abbot. The abbots are spiritual advisors and spirited leaders within the Vietnamese Buddhist community.) Finally, the researcher was successfully engaged in the process of “epoche” by suspending and bracketing his own judgment (Patton, 2002).

Limitations

The study faced the limitations of language and cultural barriers. Some of the participants have been in this country only for a short period of time; therefore, their command of the English language was limited. As a result, some translations were conducted; thus, some of the meaning may have been lost in translation. Furthermore, only one monk was the newcomer; thus, his cultural experience was a little different from
those of the mainstream monks. Lastly, the data were generalized and the 14 Vietnamese Buddhist monks were randomly selected throughout the country by snowball sampling.

**Summary**

This chapter shows there are many challenges in leadership; some are failures morally and ethically so there is a need for other leadership models. There are a few phenomenological studies about the lived experiences of Buddhist monks, such as Tibetan Buddhist monks (Love, 2008), yet none of the existing studies focus on Vietnamese Buddhist monks. The Vietnamese Buddhist monk spiritual leadership and nuances may help us understand and live in a more harmonious and peaceful society. The Vietnamese Buddhist monk applications, such as mindfulness practices and meditation, are widely used in our modern society, from schools to hospitals, from family life to maximum-security prisons. This study is also relevant in that we can gain further understanding of Buddhism in modern America and in our ever-interconnected world.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Being mindful…
Knowing that the other person is angry
one who remains mindful and calm
acts in his (or her) own best interest
as well as in the interest of the other person.
Buddhist Scripture

Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review and concepts related to the design of this study. This qualitative research study utilizes a phenomenological approach to learn about the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America. It will attempt to address these questions: (a) What are the essences of the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in spiritual leadership roles? (b) How do they describe their ethical and spiritual practices as spiritual leaders? (c) How do Vietnamese Buddhist monks perceive their roles in encouraging a spiritual life for those in leadership roles so they can effectively lead others?

The first research stream reviews historical and current literature about Buddhism and mindfulness including empirical research on mindfulness and relevant leadership theories. The second stream explores the similarities and differences between spirituality. The third stream explores moral and ethical leadership. The three streams form the conceptual framework of the study of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership. The three streams are graphically represented in Figure 3.
There is limited literature pertaining to Vietnamese Buddhist monks and their spiritual and leadership roles. Thus, this study attempts to close the void. It will contribute useful information to the ongoing discussion about different approaches to leadership and moral character education. The essence and nuances of Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ practices and contributions are needed to examine and perhaps potentially develop a new model of leadership to foster the transformation of individuals, families, and organizations for a common good.

Literature Review

Buddhism and Mindfulness: An Overview

Buddhism. From a historical perspective, Buddhism is one of the oldest religions in the world. The founder Prince Siddhartha Gotama (Gautama in Sanskrit) discovered
Buddhism in 598 B.C.E. He was born in 563 B.C.E. in Northern India and was married at the age of 16 to a beautiful and devoted young princess named Yasodhara. Prince Siddhartha lived extravagantly in his palace and was surrounded by beautiful servants without any “suffering” in sight. When he saw the struggles and suffering of his people after visiting his kingdom, he was confronted with the reality of life and the suffering of mankind, and thus decided to find the solution for all universal suffering (Rahula, 1974).

After six years of seeking the truth, at the age of 35, Prince Siddhartha – the ascetic Gotama – achieved perfection in mindfulness, the use of one’s mind-body experience to explore the nature of the human condition, suffering, and being (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Prince Siddhartha attained Enlightenment, after which he was known as the Buddha, “The Awakened One,” or “The Enlightened One.” Since then, meditation and mindfulness were rooted in those traditions.

Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, a peace activist, a writer, a poet, a scholar, and a Buddhist monk, is the champion of mindfulness. His work is said to have carried mindfulness practices into the mainstream culture. His wisdom and practice of mindfulness have provided guidance and a practical approach, which benefits individuals, families and organizations. Thich Nhat Hanh (2007) emphasized, “With mindfulness, we are aware of what is going on in our bodies, our feelings, our minds, and the world, and we avoid doing harm to ourselves and others” (p. 2). Additionally, he continued, “Mindfulness protects us, our families, and our society, and ensures a safe and happy present and a safe and happy future. Precepts are the most concrete expression of the practice of mindfulness” (p. 2).
The five most basic precepts of ancient times (not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to lie, or not to use alcohol/intoxicant or abuse substances) apply for all Buddhists today. Thich Nhat Hanh (1993, 2011) skillfully and compassionately translated these precepts for our modern time, calling them “The Five Mindfulness Trainings.” According to him,

They represent the Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and ethics. They are a concrete expression of the Buddha’s teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the path of right understanding and true love, leading to healing, transformation, and happiness for ourselves and for the world. (p. 3)

In addition, Thich Nhat Hanh (1993, 2011) pointed out that “to practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is to cultivate the insight of inter-being, or Right View, which can remove all discrimination, intolerance, anger, fear, and despair.” It is pertinent to note that the five ancient precepts were adapted to our modern time under Thich Nhat Hanh’s vision as the Five Mindfulness Trainings. They are as follows: (1) The First Mindfulness Training – Reverence For Life, (2) The Second Mindfulness Training – True Happiness (Generosity), (3) The Third Mindfulness Training – True Love (Sexual Responsibility), (4) The Fourth Mindfulness Training – Loving Speech and Deep Listening, and (5) The Fifth Mindfulness Training – Nourishment and Healing (Diet for a Mindful Society).

The details of the Five Mindfulness Trainings can benefit all of us (see Appendix A).

Another seed of strong leadership is leading by example. Venerable Thich Minh Đạt or Thich-Minh-Dat (2011) believes leadership influences by: (a) Example: teach through your actions or behavior. One must live a moral and ethical life. Benefit yourself and others, and then influence and contribute positively to our community and society. (b) Teaching by loving speech: seek understanding and wisdom. (c) Teaching
by practicing the Noble Eightfold Path: The first one is Right Thought: your thinking must be constructive and always be based on the teachings of the Buddha – Compassion and Wisdom.

**Mindfulness.** Mindfulness is derived from Buddhist and other Eastern spiritual systems that emphasize contemplation and the cultivation of conscious attention. It is one of the key values within the Buddhist tradition and practice. It is one of the unique characteristics of a successful leader. Kabat-Zinn (1990) defined mindfulness as “basically just a particular way of paying attention. It is a way of looking deeply into oneself in the spirit of self-inquiry and self-understanding” (p. 12). Mindfulness is derived from Buddhist and other Eastern spiritual belief systems that emphasize contemplation and the cultivation of conscious attention of the present moment or in the here and in the now.

Historically, mindfulness had roots in Buddhist traditions (Rosenberg, 1998; Thera, 1962). Dhiman (2008) examined the practice of mindfulness as originally presented in the Pali canon and discussed its modern applications in private and professional life. He observed that mindfulness is a technique of developing awareness of the body and the mind in the present moment. Additionally, Dhiman (2008) reviewed the original literature about mindfulness, which dated back to the Satipatthana Sutta in the Buddha’s time. However, recently it is used as a legitimate mainstream Western scientific, psychological, and clinical inquiry (Hayes & Wilson, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In other words, mindfulness can be used as one of the alternative approaches to comfort the body, mind, and spirit. Western researchers and practitioners view mindfulness in two key components: the deployment of attention and the particular quality of attention.
Furthermore, mindfulness, according to Boyatzis and McKee (2005), is “the capacity to be fully aware of all that one experiences inside the self – body, mind, heart, spirit – and to pay full attention to what is happening around us – people, the natural world, our surroundings, and events” (p. 112). Boyatzis and McKee (2005) defined mindful leaders as those who are present and fully conscious of themselves, their environment, and society in general. Goleman (2003) went further to suggest that a great leader is one who possesses emotional intelligence as well as mindfulness, hope, and compassion.

Michael Carroll (2009), author of *The Mindful Leader and Awake at Work*, pointed out:

> Recent research seems to be giving us many reasons: repaired immune systems, heightened emotional intelligence, reduced anxiety and depression, sustained levels of joy and satisfaction...Scientific studies are indicating that practicing mindfulness is just plain healthy. (p. 3)

Likewise, the recent scientific studies such as Baer (2003), Baser, Fischer, and Huss (2005), Hayes (2002), Kabat-Zinn (2003) are just a few examples of how mindfulness brings health benefits to larger society.

Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) indicated that researchers found mindfulness interventions enhance lasting improvements in self-awareness and acceptance as well as emotional stability in adults who have severe and chronic illness conditions. Baer (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of conceptual and empirical review on 21 mindfulness studies on adults who had chronic experiences of anxiety and depression. The study found that mindfulness interventions improved their lives and transformed them from distress to a normal range of functioning. Additional studies
include mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression (Segal, 2004; Teasdale & Segal, 2003), mindfulness that promotes well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003), and its application to treat borderline personality disorder and substance abusers (Dimeff & Linehan, 2008), eating disorders (Baser et al., 2005), and spirituality development for homeless youth (Grabbe, Nguy, & Higgins, 2012). Others show mindfulness can be used to reduce the violent tendencies of prisoners (Verduin, 2012). Wilkins (2005) found a significant positive relationship between cardiovascular health and certain aspects of spirituality and religion, particularly with patients who have cardiovascular disease. The study offers a different aspect of mindfulness – a solid connection between religion, spirituality, and health.

Korac-Kakabade, Kouzmin, and Kakabadse (2002) pointed out the relationship between spirituality and leadership. They observed that spirituality is traditionally rooted in religion and examined the leadership praxis with broader spirituality and in relation to contemporary leadership practices. They did a meta-analysis of the literature, reviewing different perspectives of religious entities from Christianity to Buddhism, and tied them with different leadership theories from servant leadership to transformational leadership. All these are discussed thoroughly later. Korac-Kakabadse et al. (2002) concluded that characteristics of spiritual leadership may improve personal well-being, leadership style, and spirituality; develop caring and nurturing traits; help people live a more balanced, self-reliant life; and help people become more positive, peaceful, sensitive leaders.

Korac-Kakabadse et al. (2002) also suggested that leaders who emphasize a life with spirituality lead to an articulated vision. According to Bach (2012), the spiritual leaders are voluntary and mindful with a clear mindset of making differences. He pointed out:
As His Holiness the Dalai Lama (2011) suggests in his new book “(we need) to come to our own understanding of the importance of inner values, which he believes are the source of both an ethically harmonious world and the individual peace of mind, confidence, and happiness we all seek.” (p. xv)

Furthermore, Thich-Minh-Dat, a spiritual advisor for the Vietnamese Buddhist Community in Northern California, believes that any one of us is an educator because sooner or later, we are all brother/sister, husband/wife, grandfather/grandmother and “If a doctor makes a mistake, he or she can only kill a single person, but if an educator like us makes a mistake, we can kill a whole generation” (Thich, M.-D., personal communication, July 11, 2011). As spiritual leaders, they are instilled with the above doctrine.

This finding was supported by Greenleaf’s (1977) and Covey’s (1990) studies. Hawkins (2012) conducted a qualitative study of mindfulness practices and its effects on emotion and heart function in leaders with a goal to develop a model that emphasizes ‘mindful heart’ or the essence of leading from the heart. Her research lays a foundation for further studies of the mindfulness practices that can be integrated into medical and personal cardiac care as well as organizational leadership values.

Martins (2012) studied the effectiveness of mindfulness-based stress reduction programs (MBSR) in adults. The research incorporates mixed methods with an emphasis on the Integral Inquiry Method, which helped her conduct a rigorous eight-week mindfulness-based training in meditation techniques. In line with other studies by Kabat-Zinn (1990) and Carlson and Garland (2005), Martins (2012) found that the MBSR program helps older adults acquire mindfulness abilities, which are not limited to but include, self-compassion, presence, and attentiveness. Martins (2012) also found the
older adults who participated in the program were affected in terms of their perception of their lives, aging, death, and loss.

Pryor (2011) found that the practices of loving-kindness and mindfulness meditations help individuals be more open, present, and non-judgmentally aware, and that they will improve their concentration and calmness. These practices also lead to a state of equanimity, reduce anxiety, and a sharper mind. Likewise, a study by Linehan (1993a, 1993b) shows the practices in dialectical behavioral therapy have reduced the frequency of suicidal behaviors for those diagnosed with BPD, or borderline personality disorder.

Niemiec, Rashid, and Spinella (2012) explored the integration of mindfulness meditation and character strengths. They found a strong positive correlation between mindfulness and character strengths (Borghans, Duckworth, Heckman, & terWeel, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Peterson, 2006). These authors suggested that mindfulness helps to develop other positive characteristics, such as love, kindness, fairness, and forgiveness. It also helps overcome other obstacles. One particular point Niemiec and Spinella (2012) noted is the way character strengths may serve as intervention pathways for mindful living through the five mindfulness trainings (Thich, H. N., 1993).

Ryback (2006) argued that mindfulness, emotional connection, and deep empathy contribute to mental wellbeing, and a physiologically nurtured brain helps us transcend the numbing “consensus trance” that blinds us to the deeper aspects in life. Ryback’s primary method of data collection was a review of available literature on self-determination, mindfulness, neurobiology, and humanistic psychology. The study found:
Humanistic psychology began by protecting human freedom against the reductionism of psychoanalysis and behaviorism. It has survived those two and now may be ready to engage a new field of knowledge—mindfulness and the neurological research that makes it possible to choose positive experience more freely with a stronger base in the fields of human study. (p. 111)

Engleman-Lampe and Lampe (2012) examined different methods for teaching business ethics, which have little impact using the traditional approach such as case studies, philosophy, religion, or moral dilemmas. Yet, the need to educate students about how the mind works in order to help them to make ethical decisions is growing, and mindfulness is one of the alternatives. As the Engleman-Lampe and Lampe study pointed out, mindfulness meditation has been shown to increase personal awareness and improve one’s cognitive and emotional regulation, while recent studies show high levels of mindfulness correlate with more ethical decision making.

The study also presents the Mindfulness Based Business Ethics Education as a new approach to teaching business ethics. It draws upon the advancement in neuroscience – the plasticity of the brain through new experience, and current scientific knowledge about the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral regulation qualities of mindful meditation (Engleman-Lampe & Lampe, 2012). Mindfulness, as the authors pointed out, helps students distinguish how to be in the here and in the now, increases present moment awareness, and offers students the phenomenological experience of the shift in awareness and attention.

Wachs and Cordova (2007) tested the theory that mindfulness contributes to greater intimate relationship satisfaction by fostering more relationally skillful emotion repertoires. It is the relationship between conscious attending to the present moment as well as the enactment of emotions and relationship quality. This is part of a larger study
on emotional skillfulness. Their research consisted of a total of 66 people, which comprised 33 married couples. The mean age for husbands was 40 while that of the wives was 38 and the duration of their marriages averaged 12 years. Most of the participants were Caucasian, while only three individuals were identified as non-white. The study found that mindfulness (a state of consciousness in which one is oriented to the present moment) confers specific benefits in the context of intimate relationships. Additionally, it found that couples who practice mindfulness are more likely to enjoy a greater relationship of good health and stability and an ultimate increase in satisfaction and affectionate behavior as well as a greater inter-partner harmony on a wide range of life issues.

Although Gazella’s (2005) interview of Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a professor of Medicine Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, is not a scientific or research paper, it is profoundly important to know the man who brought mindfulness to medicine. This interview took place in San Diego in 2005 after Dr. Kabat-Zinn’s presentation at the Scripps Center for Integrative Medicine. His work successfully brought mindfulness into the mainstream of medicine.

Kabat-Zinn defined mindfulness as paying “attention to your own inner experience by quieting the mind, by investigating the mind through direct first-person experience” (as cited in Gazella, 2005, p. 58). He added that we have the innate capacity for a more accurate seeing, for learning, growing, and healing as well as for transformation across our entire life span. He also observed, “if you are always paying attention to other people’s lives rather than your own, you are missing not only the point,
but you are missing your life. The challenge is to live your life as if it really matters” (as cited in Gazella, 2005, p. 59). He advised that we need to be conscious of how you conduct your life—from what you eat and drink, to the newspapers you read and the television programs you watch, to how you are in relationship with everything, with those you love, with nature, with your body, with the world. (p. 59)

Overall, Dr. Kabat-Zinn (as cited in Gazella, 2005) accentuated:

We need to know more about the science/art of compassion, the science/art of empathy, the science/art of acceptance…and for that matter, the potential of what we might call wisdom of enhancing health and wellbeing of both individual and of the society as a whole. (p. 64)

He has gradually and successfully integrated mindfulness into the medical education and the American mainstremes. Today, according to Kabat-Zinn (as cited in Gazella, 2005), “MSBR is now being used in medical centers and clinics and hospitals around the country and around the world” (p. 61).

**Spirituality and leadership.**

*Spirituality and spirited leaders.* According to Dalai Lama (1999), spirituality has to do with the “qualities of the human spirit—such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony—which bring happiness to both self and others” (p. 22). Spirited leaders such as Pope Benedict XVI, Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Nelson Mandela are embracing the notions of compassion, wisdom, determination, altruism, and spirituality as well as non-discrimination. They are spiritually inspired leaders motivated by a “strong sense of calling.” Delbecq (2008) suggested the following as a number of characteristics of organizational leadership that emerged as elements of spirituality:
1. Accomplishes its central purpose through leadership motivated by a strong sense of calling
2. Is driven by a deep sense of mission
3. Embraces subsidiarity (involvement of and openness to others)
4. Is an organizational community sensitive to human dignity
5. Is committed to a stewardship of resources that understands efficiency and effectiveness as spiritual values, not simple market imperatives
6. Is attentive to the common good, justice, and the needs of the poor. (p. 488)

Thurman (2001) described the same concepts when he stated the following:

His Holiness (the Dalai Lama) has often challenged leaders of world religions, including Buddhists, Hindus, and Secular Humanists (which he considers a world religion/ideology, whether Marxist or Liberal Democratic), by saying that now is past the time when anyone should be attempting to convert others to a different belief system or institutional affiliation. If persisted in, it will lead to worse violence in the future than it already has in the past. (p. 69)

On spiritually, His Holiness has urged that we need to learn from each other. Thurman (2001) put it differently when “he cautions, they should take whatever they learn and use anything that seems good to them to enhance their original tradition, thereby remaining integrated with their families, communities, and local customs, perhaps even enriching their own traditions” (pp. 69-70). Leadership is about making a difference in the lives of others. It is the legitimacy that all spiritual leaders have a sincere intention of making transformation in the larger context; it is their authenticity characteristic embedded in the spirited leaders. Becker’s (2009) work found that genuine leadership is based on moral principles and the vision of a good life for the followers as well as the leaders. He concluded that while moral leadership is grounded in the personal morality of authenticity and the solid structures of corporate ethics, it can only succeed when leaders execute their action plans. This appears similar to George’s (2008) definition of authentic leaders. Authentic leaders, as George pointed out, demonstrate five qualities: “(a) understanding their purpose, (b) practicing solid values, (c) leading
with heart, (d) establishing close and enduring relationships, and (e) demonstrating self-discipline” (p. 92).

Duchon and Plowman (2005) suggested that spiritual leaders have the charisma and build a strong relationship in a way that allows employees to engage meaningfully in their work and improve performance in modern organizational interventions. According to Tepper (2003), an individual with a strong inner sense of spirituality will be more likely to find meaning, will be more satisfied with their work, and will contribute significantly more than the non-spiritual one. Additionally, he suggested they are more likely to be open-minded and have the ability to experience gratitude for ordinary events. They have a high intolerance for inequity and seek meaning for their spiritual journeys.

Worthington, Hook, Davis, and McDaniel (2011) suggested that in therapeutic practices, leaders in the field of psychotherapy use spiritual and religious practices as an alternative approach. Worthington et al. (2011) noted, “the meta-analytic results present clear findings about the effectiveness of religious and spiritual accommodation” (p. 13). Their findings are consistent with Smith, Bartz, and Richards (2007), as they concluded that religious and spiritual psychotherapies outperformed alternate psychotherapies on both psychological and spiritual outcomes. Furthermore, Worthington et al. (2011) concluded that religious/spiritually oriented psychotherapy is effective, and religious and spiritual psychotherapies offer spiritual benefits to clients that are not present in secular psychotherapies.

**Leaders and spirituality.** Boorom (2009) suggested leadership has roots in religion, as there is a direct correlation between leadership and spirituality qualities. Marques (2010) urged, “it is perfectly possible to be spiritual yet not religious. There are
many spiritual people who are atheists, agnostics, or that embrace multiple religions at the same time” (p. 13). For her, “a spiritual worker is a person who simply maintains good human values, such as respect, tolerance, goodwill, support, and an effort to establish more meaning in his or her workplace” (p. 13). DeVost (2010) emphasized that current research in organizations has found a relationship between the spirituality of the leaders and the workplace spirituality. In this study, Devost (2010) found that the practice of encouraging the heart – one of the five exemplified leadership values – was significantly positive. According to Kouzes and Posner (1995), the five practices of good leadership are: “Challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, model the way, and encourage the heart” (p. 9).

Meanwhile, leaders often practice their spiritual lives as well as their moral beliefs and ethical values. As Northouse (2004) has argued, ethics and leadership are “concerned with the kinds of values and morals an individual or society finds desirable or appropriate” (p. 342). Furthermore, he pointed out that an ethical model of leadership consists of five components: (a) show respect, (b) serve others, (c) show justice, (d) manifest honesty, and (e) build community. In another study, Zhu, May, and Avolio (2004) define ethical leadership as “doing what is right, just and good” (p. 16). Zhu et al. (2004) added that leaders exhibit ethical behaviors when they are doing what is morally right, just, and good, and when they help to elevate followers' moral awareness and moral self-actualization. Bass and Steidlmeier (1998) suggest that a truly transformational and effective leadership must be based upon: (a) the moral character of the leader and their concern for oneself and others, (b) the ethical values embedded in the leader’s vision, and
(c) the morality of the processes and social ethical choices and actions in which the leaders and followers engage.

**Moral and ethical leadership.**

**Moral leadership.** Moral leadership is the business of making a difference in the lives of others and moving forward in a positive direction. The effect has to be transformative. As Burns (1978) pointed out, both leaders and followers help and hold each other to higher levels of morality and enthusiasm. Or as Yukl (2006) put it, to achieve a shared common purpose, leaders and followers are engaging, motivating, and inspiring each other to achieve what is best of the organization. To do so, Bennis (1993) emphasized that leaders must make adjustments or utilize resources effectively, be creative, and empower others.

The reason for Bennis’s (1993) concepts is because serving others is the essence of moral leadership. It is said that servant leadership has strong links to major religions in the world. For example, in Buddhism, the concept of serving others is serving the Buddha (Thich, M.-D., 2011). Also, in Christianity, Dennis (2004) suggested, “scholars who accept the moral premises of servant leadership theory trace its origins to a discussion between Jesus Christ and his disciples, as recorded in Luke, chapter 22 verses 24-27” (p. 12). Finally, for Dennis, servant leadership requires the full embodiment of serving God, which means serving with all your heart and soul. As of the servant leadership in Vietnamese Buddhism, it is the art of serving others while searching for spiritual freedom. Ho (2009) pointed out, “Vietnamese Buddhism is highly ethical and moral. It teaches how to live here, on earth, in harmony with nature, cosmic energies, and all human beings” (p. 227).
Robert Greenleaf first coined the term servant leadership in 1970 in his seminal book titled *The Servant as Leader*. This construct has regained popularity in recent years due to its strong altruistic and ethical overtones (Northouse, 2004). Greenleaf (1995) described his model as one that encourages “collaboration, trust, foresight, listening, and the ethical use of power and empowerment” (p. 1). He argued that servant leadership is serving first with dignity. Customers, employees, and community as a whole have the highest priority. For Greenleaf (1995), servant leadership implies leaders primarily lead by serving others – employees, customers, and community. The major traits of servant leaders include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, foresight, persuasion, conceptualization, stewardship, commitment to others’ growth and community building. They subjugate their personal needs and desires for the good of the greater community.

Meanwhile, Cerit (2010), who collected data from 563 teachers working in primary schools in Duzce, Turkey, revealed a significant and positive relationship between servant leadership behaviors of principals and the teachers' commitment to school. Furthermore, Schaubroeck, Lam, and Peng (2011) found that servant leadership influenced team performance through affect-based trust and team psychological safety.

However, principle-centered leadership, developed by Covey in 1989, can address the challenges of both management and leadership (Covey, 1991, 2008). His concept of principle-centered leadership was meant to serve as an antidote for “restoring the moral and character ethic at the individual level” (p. 32). It is essential to know that his research on perception and success dated back to the period of 1776 to 1926. He found “there are basic principles of effective living, and that people can only experience true success and enduring happiness as they learn and integrate these principles into their
basic character” (p. 18). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* embody the essence of becoming a balanced, integrated, powerful person and creating a mutually respectful relationship. The seven habits are: “(a) be proactive, (b) begin with the end in mind, (c) put first things first, (d) think win-win, (e) seek first to understand, then to be understood, (f) synergize, and (g) sharpen the saw” (pp. 152-153).

In 1991, Covey introduced his second book in the leadership series titled *Principle-Centered Leadership*. This book is not focused on the individual, but on the leadership and management development at the managerial and organizational levels. Covey identified the eight traits of principle-centered leaders: “(a) continually learning, (b) service-oriented, (c) radiate positive energy, (d) believe in other people, (e) lead balanced lives, (f) see life as an adventure, (g) are synergistic (defined), and (h) exercise for self-renewal” (Covey, 1991, pp. 33-39). The essence of the work is stated thus, “In order to thrive, innovate, excel and lead in a Knowledge Worker age, we must build on and move beyond effectiveness…. to greatness” (Covey, 2004, audiobook). However, he argued, “accessing the higher levels of human genius and motivation in today’s new reality requires a sea (of) change of new thinking - a new mind-set, a new skill-set, a new tool-set - in short, a whole new habit” (p. 432). This is the essence of ethical leadership.

*Ethical leadership.* Ethical Leadership has a foundation in spirituality. DePree (1989), Etzioni (1993), Fairholm (1997), and Kiefer (1992) pointed out that leadership involves influencing people’s souls rather than controlling their actions. Fairholm (1997) believes leadership involves connecting with others. Thus:

As leaders commit to the care of the whole person, they must include spiritual care into their practices… Leaders in the new century must consider and actively
engage in making for themselves and then helping their followers make these connections. (p. 8)

A leader’s influence stems from his or her knowledge of the organizational culture, customs, values, and traditions. Fry (2003) suggested the two fundamental keystones: a culture based on love and a sense of calling. However, his spiritual leadership model “calls for a more holistic leadership that helps to integrate the four fundamental arenas that define the essence of human existence in the workplace — the body (physical), mind (logical/rational thought), heart (emotions; feelings), and spirit” (p. 722). In the study, Fry (2003) suggested that spiritual leadership can be used as an intrinsic motivation via the eyes of vision, hope, faith, and altruistic love. The graphic representation is as in Figure 4.

![Figure 4. Spiritual leadership as intrinsic motivation through vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love. (Fry, 2003, p. 719)](image-url)
Contemporary studies have also cast some light on spirituality at work and in leadership (Benefiel, 2005; Heifetz & Linksy, 2002; Wheatley, 2005). Issues and trends on spiritual development and spirituality are emerging as one of the vital aspects of human growth and well-being. Specifically, Heifetz and Linksy (2002) have observed all leaders must pay attention to the hearts and minds of others. According to Bach (2012), the spiritual leaders are voluntary and mindful with a clear mindset of making differences. He pointed out as His Holiness the Dalai Lama (2011) suggested in his new book “(we need) to come to our own understanding of the importance of inner values, which he believes are the source of both an ethically harmonious world and the individual peace of mind, confidence, and happiness we all seek” (p. xv). Furthermore, Thich-Minh-Dat, a spiritual advisor for the Vietnamese Buddhist Community in Northern California, believes any one of us is an educator because sooner or later, we are all brother/sister, husband/wife, grandfather/grandmother and “If a doctor makes a mistake, he or she can only kill a single person, but if an educator like us makes a mistake, we can kill a whole generation” (Thich, M. D., personal communication, July 11, 2011). As spiritual leaders, they are instilled with the above doctrine.

Burns’s (1978) work on leadership focused on aspirational and visionary leadership (see also Kouzes & Posner, 1999, 2002; Richards & Engle, 1986). In particular, Kouzes and Posner (1995, 1999) stated, leaders “ignite” subordinates’ passions and serve as a compass by which to guide followers. They define leadership as “the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations” (p. 30). The emphasis lies in the follower’s desire to contribute and the leader’s ability to motivate others to action. Leaders respond to customers, create vision, energize employees, and
thrive in fast-paced “chaotic” environments. For them, “leaders are pioneers—people who are willing to step out into the unknown, as they are willing to take risks, to innovate and experiment in order to find new and better ways of doing things” (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, pp. 9-10). Thus, leadership is about articulating visions, embodying core values, and creating the environment within which things can be accomplished. According to Kouzes and Posner (1999), an aspirational and spiritual component of leadership is the “practice of encouraging the heart” (p. 267). In encouraging the heart, Kouzes and Posner (1999) added their voices to the discussion of soul and spirit in the workplace. They argued leaders build relationships and mutual relationship is between an individual and his or her work. For them “we all work for a purpose, and that purpose has to be served if we are to feel encouraged” (p. xv). They identified in their work seven essential components of a caring relationship: “(a) setting clear standards, (b) expecting the best, (c) paying attention, (d) personalizing recognition, (e) telling the story, (f) celebrating together, and (g) setting the example” (Kouzes & Posner, 1999, p. xv).

It is essential to note at this junction that ethical leadership has its transformational component. Bass and Avolio (1994) believe leaders and followers help each other achieve and advance their objectives. The authors claim a transformational leader is charismatic and has a vision, which inspires the followers to work harder in order to achieve their shared goals. Transformational leaders provide followers with a strong sense of purpose as well as emotional bonds (Bass & Avolio, 1994). In alignment with Bass and Avolio (1994), Bass and Steidlmeier (1998) observed that the literature reviews on transformational leadership are linked to the characteristics of virtue and moral characters. However, it is proper to note that this perspective was first introduced
by Burns (1978) who based his theory on a foundation of a social-historical perspective with an incorporation of moral development and mutual interdependence of human interaction.

For Burns (1978), transformational leadership is a process wherein “leaders and followers (as they) raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation” (p. 83). He celebrates the fact that followers are assumed to transcend self-interest for the good of the group, consider long-term objectives, and develop an awareness of what is important. However, Bennis (1993) approached the issue of leadership from a different perspective, but to the point. Thus, Bennis (1993) noted effective leaders often carry out different functions such supporting, constructing, and empowering others in their organizations. He hinged his perspective on the assertion that leaders transform organizations by aligning human and other resources, creating an organizational culture that fosters the free expression of ideas and empowering others to contribute to the organization. Furthermore, Bennis (1993) distinguished the differences between leaders and managers. For him, “leaders are people who do the right thing; managers are people who do things right” (p. 18). On his part, Yukl (2006) urged that transformational leadership is the business of engaging, motivating, and inspiring other people to achieve a shared vision or purpose. This goes far and beyond self-interest to consider what is best for the organization or for the greater good.

The scholars such as Wall and Arden (1990), Scharmer (2007), and Senge et al. (2004) are advocates of one of the ancient ideas from China and Greece about leadership, which they believe comes “with power…[and] wisdom” (p. 179). As Love (2008) noted in her dissertation, “Senge et al., have researched deeper levels of learning to suggest that
business, government and educational organizations are changing in their thinking and
actions related to learning and the future” (p. 25). She argued that the thinking and
decision making of “business leaders, and entrepreneurs lead to a new type of learning
that encourages thinking of organizations as a living breathing, whole system” (p. 12). In
2004, Senge et al. introduced the concepts of “presence” – a mindfulness approach to
transform oneself and others. However, Scharmer (2007) transformed that concept into
presencing, defined as “A blend of ‘presence’ and ‘sensing.’ Presencing signifies a
heightened state of attention that allows individuals and groups to shift the inner place
from which they function” (p. 1).

In their contribution to the discussion of leadership, Mackenzie and Barnes (2007)
examined 11 different types of leadership approaches, but noted they were not completed.
Dion (2011) analyzed eight leadership approaches: directive leadership, self-leadership,
authentic leadership, transactional leadership, shared leadership, servant leadership,
charismatic leadership, and transformational leadership, and concluded that “any culture
of leadership cannot be built without a basic link between given ethical theories and
specific representations of reality” (p. 20). Thus, this study of the lived experience of
Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America may contribute significantly to the different
approaches to leadership and perhaps with the potential of developing a new model of
leadership to foster change in individuals, families, and organizations for the greater
good.

Summary

This chapter discussed and analyzed the three streams of this phenomenological
research: Buddhism and mindfulness, spirituality and leadership, and moral and ethical
leadership. It also re-introduced and discussed the three guiding research questions, the conceptual framework of the study, and its research methods. The literature review noted a lack of literature on Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ lived experiences and perspectives. There is also a need for other leadership approaches to be explored. After an extensive review of literature from Buddhism to mindfulness, from spirituality to leadership, and from moral to ethical leadership, there is room for another Eastern approach about leadership and change. The relevant literature review noted that the notion of leadership with spirituality, morality, ethics, and mindfulness can be a solution for today’s world (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Korac-Kakabadse et al., 2002; Martins 2012; Thich, H. N., 2011). According to Love (2008), there is a need to study other Buddhist monks’ lived experiences. This study will fill the void in current literature and possibly provide a different leadership theory. It will endorse the knowledge of moral character education and how spirited and religious leaders perceive their leadership roles that ultimately transform the lives of individuals, families, and societies at large and ensure social justice.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Don't blindly believe what I say. Don't believe me because others convince you of my words. Don't believe anything you see, read, or hear from others, whether of authority, religious teachers or texts. Don't rely on logic alone, nor speculation. Don't infer or be deceived by appearances. Do not give up your authority and follow blindly the will of others. This way will lead to only delusion. Find out for yourself what is truth, what is real. Discover that there are virtuous things and there are non-virtuous things. Once you have discovered for yourself give up the bad and embrace the good. (The Buddha)

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the general knowledge and in-depth understanding of the experience of Vietnamese Buddhists monks in their spiritual leadership roles. This study was done using a phenomenological research design that emphasizes the learning of lived-experiences and their essences. Creswell (2007) reminded us that qualitative research focuses on the phenomenon or issues in discourse. According to Moustakas (1994), “Phenomenology is a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness” (p. 49). According to Patton (1990), phenomenological research contributes to knowledge and theory to further understand the operation of the world. This researcher adopted a phenomenological approach to gather data about the Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ lived experiences as well as to explore the themes and core values that emerged from the data collection. The researcher also hoped to learn more about the nuances and contributions of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks who are living in the United States of America as well as their leadership styles with the hope that this information may connect Buddhist spiritual values and practices with the custom of leadership. The guiding research questions for the study were:
1. What are the essences of the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in spiritual leadership roles?
2. How do they describe their ethical and spiritual practices as spiritual leaders?
3. How do Vietnamese Buddhist monks perceive their roles in encouraging a spiritual life for those in leadership roles so they can effectively lead others?

With a phenomenological approach, an in-depth examination of the participants’ lived experiences, their leadership styles, values, roles, and practices were conducted. This exploration helps make the participants’ experiences and their essences of spiritual leadership roles, perceptions, and practices understandable. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore their ethical and spiritual practices. Thus, research methods included individual and focus group interviews, observation and field notes as well as an artifact review. A multiple methods approach enables triangulation of findings and reliability of results. This chapter introduces the research design and the rationale for its appropriateness to this investigation. Described are the research population, site, and issues of site access. Discussed are procedures for data collection and analysis as well as ethical considerations.

**Research Design and Rationale**

**Introduction of the Design**

The research methods included 14 semi-structured interviews, field notes, and observation as well as a collection of relevant artifacts to explore the monks’ ethical and spiritual practices and their leadership roles. The 12 personal interviews were face-to-face; whenever face-to-face was not available, interviews were conducted online. In fact, only two interviews were conducted via telephone. Besides the personal interview,
which was the most common and logical method to collect data in the phenomenological approach, field note recording or “memoing” enabled the researcher to see, experience, or hear the unspoken language (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69).

**Rationale**

This was a phenomenological research study with a philosophical and religious approach that included an inductive process of inquiry (Creswell, 2008; Giorgi, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher used the philosophical phenomenological method (Creswell, 2011; Giorgi 1985; Moustakas, 1994), which encompasses three steps: (a) the reduction, (b) the description, and (c) the search for essences (Love, 2008). Creswell (2003) observed, “a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of the lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 57). Furthermore, he explained, “the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (a ‘grasp of the very nature of the thing,’ van Manen, 1990, p. 177)” (p. 58). For Moustakas (1994), the purpose of the phenomenological approach is “to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (p. 13). It also “describes the meaning of several individuals’ lived experiences of a phenomenon” (p. 57).

The phenomenological approach therefore was an appropriate approach to take to describe the lived-experiences of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks; it explored their *lived-world*, sought their profound internal experiences and issues so as to make their voices to be heard as well as their contributions to be recognized. According to Groenewald (2004), this science of pure “phenomena” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 55) is concrete and
captured by the slogan “Back to the things themselves!” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 56; Kruger, 1988, p. 28; Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Thus, it is vital to extract the essence of the lived experiences and in-depth understanding of Vietnamese Buddhists monks in their spiritual leadership roles.

Berg (2004) suggests that, since it is a phenomenological study, purposive sample selection for participants to answer open-ended interview questions will enable the researcher to understand the phenomenon of interest and answer the related research questions. In alignment with Berg (2004), Creswell (2012) also noted that purposeful sampling may be most appropriate in this research. Creswell (2012) pointed out, “Researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (p. 206).

**Site and Population**

**Population Description**

According to Creswell (2012), “a population is a group of individuals who have the same characteristic” (p. 142). For this study, the population was comprised of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in the United States of America. According to Thich Quang Minh (2007), there are around 300 temples in the United States, but there are only about 100 monks who are ordained and hold abbot or leadership roles. As an abbot, a spiritual advisor and leader of a Vietnamese Buddhist Temple, Zen center, or Monastery, the monk provides guidance and services for all the people in that community. These services are faith-based such as Vesak, Ullambana, New Year celebrations, conducting marriage, counseling, weekly Dharma (the teaching of Buddha), and death and memorial services. They provide spiritual guidance and advice to refugees, youths, newcomers,
and many other Buddhists. They also help retain and or promote humanistic values such as compassion, wisdom, and mindfulness, as well as their Vietnamese culture and heritage. Overall, their goals are to bring peace and harmony to the world for a greater good.

As noted earlier, the population of this research was Vietnamese American ordained monks who practice Vietnamese Buddhism and hold leadership roles, such as Abbot of a temple or spiritual advisor, for many Vietnamese and American Buddhist laypersons. They were a part of the first wave of Vietnamese refugees known as “boat people” after the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. They were all fully ordained as Abbots or Masters and are the head masters or key spiritual leaders at their temples. All the monks are older than 40 years due to their early immigration from the Vietnam War era and for their Abbot roles, although the monks who recently came to the United States tend to be younger. The researcher interviewed 14 monks with ages ranging from the early 40s to the early 80s.

**Participant Selection**

The researcher followed the guidelines for snowball effect and purposeful sampling in qualitative research methods (Creswell, 2010; Patton, 2002; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). This study also adopted homogeneous sampling, in which participants “possess a similar trait or characteristic” (p. 208). This method, as with purposeful sampling, helped the researcher in the approachability and accessibility of the participants and allowed him to gain an in-depth and poignant knowledge of Buddhist practices and values. As Love (2008) noted, the research “seeks for participation from people who offered the most rich and comprehensive information about the phenomenon” (also see
The participants were confirmed with the recommendation of Venerable Thich-Thien-Duyen, the Abbot of Kim Quang Buddhist Temple in Sacramento, California. As Love (2008) observed, researchers engage in snowball, or chain, sampling whenever possible. Patton (2002) defined snowball sampling as the identification of cases of interest that arise when questioning people who “know people, who know what cases are information rich” (p. 243). The researcher used existing contacts with monks and their followers to gain information about other potential participants. By consulting with other Vietnamese Buddhists practitioners, the sincere intention was to gather a participant population representative of Vietnamese Buddhist monks from different corners of the United States. Lastly, establishing a geographically broad list increases the generalizability of this research’s findings.

The researcher interviewed 14 Vietnamese Buddhist monks living across the United States of America. The researcher conducted interviews via snowball sampling of 14 Vietnamese Buddhist monks of different backgrounds, ages, traditions, and experiences. Only Vietnamese Buddhist monks who were Abbots were included in the study.

**Identification and Invitation**

The researcher sent emails to known Vietnamese Buddhist monks at Kim Quang Buddhist Temple in Sacramento, California (see Appendix B). The snowball sampling was also utilized; the names of other possible Buddhist temples or monks were obtained and they were contacted by phone call or email. The researcher contacted each participant individually in person whenever possible to invite the Buddhist monk to the research project. The researcher, via a follow-up phone call and email, explained the
study to the participant. A synopsis of the study was also emailed or described to all participants. The researcher presented the process to each participant and sought their consent (see Appendix C) prior to participating in either an interview or focus group. The researcher provided participants with a consent form to be signed and gave them opportunities to ask for any additional information they needed before, during, and after the interview/focus group.

**Site Description**

This research began in Sacramento, California, and the snowball effect reached other cities such as Hayward, Chicago, San Jose, Baton Rouge, Santa Ana, Denver, Fremont, Bansall, Watsonville, Pheland, San Diego, and the East Bay. The majority of the Vietnamese temples, monasteries, or Zen centers that are not-for-profit or religious organizations are open to the public (thus site access was not an issue). Quite often, such temples also serve as cultural centers and as sources of refuge for different individuals to seek peace and tranquility (Thich, Q. M., 2007). It is noted that each temple or Zen center consisted of at least one monk and sometimes as many as 30 monks. This study was not limited to any particular site.

**Site Access**

All the monks live in the Vietnamese Buddhist temples, including the Kim Quang Buddhist Temple in Sacramento, California, where the researcher conducted the first interview. The temples were always accessible to the public. Therefore, there was no formal site access permission. The researcher is also a native-tongued Vietnamese familiar with its culture and tradition. The researcher also speaks the same language and shares a common culture with the participants. However, as a courtesy, the researcher
emailed and called to make interview appointments with the participants to ensure site accessibility. The site access was not an issue the researcher faced.

**Research Methods**

**Description of Method Used**

The central data collection was conducted by interviews, which were transcribed. The research data was triangulated through the use of field notes, the collection of artifacts, and interviews with participants. This method increased the credibility and reliability of the research results. Cohen and Manion (2000) defined triangulation as an “attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint” (p. 254). For Altrichter, Feldman, Posch, and Somekh (2008), triangulation gives a more specified and well-adjusted picture of the situation. Thus, the purposive sampling enabled the researcher to explore the lived experiences of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks living throughout the United States of America through 14 semi-structured interviews, observations, a personal research journal, and artifacts review.

**Semi-Structured Interview**

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended that in the phenomenological study approach, personal interviewing is the most common and logical method to collect data. The list of interview questions, designed to extract information for research, were formed and articulated with professors and friends. The semi-structured interview questions were conducted mostly in English and some were in Vietnamese. Over 90% of the research questions during the interviews were open-ended questions (see Appendix D). Creswell (2012) recommended the researcher should “ask open-ended questions so that
the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (p. 218).

The individual and face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants; in some cases, when the participants were too far away geographically, the interviews were conducted via Skype or FaceTime. The researcher recorded the time, location, and position of the interviewees using MacBook Pro Quicktime as a backup plan and recorded video and audio as possible. The Interview Protocol forms (see Appendix D) were kept for confidentiality and archival purposes within the codebook. Audio records and interviews were stored and keep confidentially as well (Creswell, 2012).

**Semi-Structured Focus Group Interview**

The researcher used the above described method to gather shared understandings of several Buddhist monks in order to get their perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes. According to Creswell (2012), a focus group interview “is the process of collecting data through interviews with a group of people, typically four to six. It has advantages when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information and...[be] cooperative with each other” (p. 218). Russ-Eft and Preskill (2009) added that a focus group consists of “participants who share a common experience and can collectively address” (p. 315) the subjects being discussed. In this study, the researcher conducted one focus group with the Vietnamese Buddhist monks at Kim son Monastery in northern California. This focus group was conducted in English using open-ended questions (see Appendix E) to allow the interaction between the participants and to let them talk freely. They took their turns talking in a relaxed environment of the Buddhist temple setting.
Observation Protocol and Field Notes

The researcher developed an observation protocol and field notes form to document observations during the face-to-face interviews that included facial expressions, non-verbal cues, and other factors such as decorations in the surrounding environment. Shorthand (a quick way to write notes such as symbols and numbers) and notations were used during semi-structured interviews as well as the reflective notes of each interview. The field notes followed the format in Creswell (2012, Figure 7.5, p. 133). The audio/video recording and written T-chart notes were recorded and stored in the personal journals and personal computer laptop and notebook.

Artifact Review

The collected artifacts served as data in developing the emergent themes from the data field. In addition, since artifact review validated the research, the researcher collected and/or observed any artifacts pertaining to the interviewee such as letters, books, pictures, and decorations from the participants or at the research site. Whenever possible, and with appropriate permissions, the researcher reviewed and described relevant artifacts, then conducted analysis on these items.

Transcribing Interview Texts

The researcher gathered a great deal of text from those interviewed. The interviews were primarily in English, though some were conducted in Vietnamese. Consequently, some answers were largely in Vietnamese, though a number were in broken English when participants could not express themselves fully or when they needed further clarification. The researcher translated and transcribed all interviews from the recordings as professionally as possible. The researcher worked diligently and as
accurately and professionally as possible as a translator. Another accomplished translator validated the researcher’s translation. Furthermore, the handwritten journals were compared with the recorded conversations to ensure its true reflection of the interviewed.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

In vivo and descriptive coding was used in the phenomenological research. According to Saldana (2009), descriptive coding and in vivo coding are “appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies…that prioritize and honor the participant’s voices” (p. 74). Codes can be concepts, ideas, topics, and terms/phrases or keywords that signify “what is going on in this piece of data” while coding is the meticulous analytic process of examining data for significant events, experiences, feelings, etc. that are then denoted as concepts (Merriam, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The in vivo coding often reveals the behavior or process, while descriptive coding gives a summary and descriptive forms.

More importantly, while in vivo coding helps “us to preserve participants’ meanings of their views and actions” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55), descriptive coding is “to assist the reader to see what you saw and to hear what you heard” (Saldana, 2009, p. 71). This descriptive coding was then categorized and analyzed in the analytic or theoretical coding process. The coding process helped the researcher summarize and condense the vast information gathered during the interview and focus group discussions.

In the analysis phase, all transcripts from the interviews were reviewed and coded for relevant and significant emergent themes were compiled into findings. Furthermore, unspoken cues and observations, such as facial expressions, movements, and non-verbal communication, were analyzed. Field notes from the interview protocol, observational
protocol, and relevant artifacts were examined and analyzed for emergent themes of the study.

After the interviews, the focus group and artifacts review were analyzed using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (see Creswell, 2007). Significant declarations were merged or the “horizontalization” process was applied for emergent themes (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Researchers determined a “composite description that characterizes the ‘essence’ of the lived phenomenon, called the essential, invariant structure (or essence)” (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). A textual description was then surveyed. After that, the structural description – the how of the experience – was assembled to provide context to the experiences contained in the textural description. The final stage of data gathering was assimilating the textural and structural descriptions into a complete composite description. Figure 5 demonstrates the various stages of data collection. The proposed timeline for data collection, analysis, and reporting follows in Table 1.

![Figure 5](image-url)
Table 1

Proposed Timeline for Data Analysis and Reporting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing and presenting research proposal</td>
<td>April/May, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral committee review and revisions</td>
<td>May, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal defense hearing and approval</td>
<td>June, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Passing – Preparation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• IRB Certification Approval - Drexel University</td>
<td>July, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recruitment of participants</td>
<td>July/August, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second Passing – Data Collection</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Field research – Conduct first interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identify and conduct next participants (snowball) (10-15 additional participants)</td>
<td>August–November, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make observation, collect and identify artifacts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conduct a focus group study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third Passing – Data Organization and Analysis</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transcription and coding</td>
<td>November–December, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Data analysis – Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method</td>
<td>December–January, 2013-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth Passing – Data interpretation and writing</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Report findings and discussion of findings</td>
<td>January–February, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dissertation revisions</td>
<td>February–March, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Submission and defense of dissertation</td>
<td>March–April, 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethical Considerations

In any research on human populations, the researcher must complete the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirement of Drexel University before doing the research (see Appendix F). It was standard to respect the privacy, fair treatment, and human dignity of all participants and to ensure all proper procedures and ethical practices were followed or observed (Creswell, 2011). There was an introductory email and/or phone call to potential participants. The research goals and objectives were presented in writing and were clearly explained either in English or Vietnamese to each individual. The consent forms or written permissions to participate in this study were signed before interviews began. Furthermore, study participants participated in a single semi-structured interview that lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. Some selected monks in California participated in one focus group, which lasted about 60 minutes. The focus group took place in Northern California at a convenient gathering for the monks. Those participating in the focus group were informed they were in a focus group by the existence of other group members. Even though participants could withdraw at any time during either an interview or a focus group, none of them did. Their data were kept confidential.

The IRB process reassured the participants of complete confidentiality and inspired trustworthy and honorable responses from the participants. It was respectful to use names and titles for Vietnamese Buddhist monks. Therefore, all the identifiable information was used with the permissions of the participants to preserve and protect the participants’ integrity as well as to honor and respect them.
Summary

Chapter 3 presented the research design and methods, including the research design and rationale, site, and population. The semi-structured questionnaire and procedures were outlined. The interview questions, data collection, artifact review, and focus group procedures were thoroughly discussed. A focus group discussion was essential to learn more about the interaction between the researcher and the participants’ knowledge and experience related to the issue (Creswell, 2010); it was also employed as a method of triangulating the research methods. Moreover, the detail of data collection, analysis procedures, and its proposed timeline for data analysis and reporting was revealed. Finally, the ethical considerations of the study were presented.
Chapter 4: Findings, Results, and Interpretations

What are the paths, the practices, for actualizing the great enlightenment? Morality, concentrated meditation, and wisdom, enhanced by compassion. All Buddhist systems have compassion at their root. In the morality of abandoning the ten non-virtues—the three physical nonvirtues (killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct), the four verbal nonvirtues (lying, divisive talk, harsh speech, and senseless chatter), and the three mental nonvirtues (covetousness, harmful intent, and wrong view)—the prohibition against killing includes not just humans, but all living beings; it is not suitable to harm living being. This is due to the fact that the very foundation of Buddhism is compassion.—His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Introduction

Chapter 4 of the phenomenological qualitative study presents the outcomes of the interviews, focus group, and artifact analyses via this qualitative research titled, Mindful Leadership—A Phenomenological Study of Vietnamese Buddhist Monks in America with Respect to their Spiritual Leadership Roles and Contributions to Society, as extracted from the lived-experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks residing in the United States. The leadership styles, experiences, and contributions of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in the United States, as well as in other countries, are not well-documented or studied. More specifically, there is little understanding of how Vietnamese Buddhist monks got here, what their beliefs are, their practices, and their spiritual leadership roles in the communities in which they reside.

The purpose of this research was to explore and understand the lives of Vietnamese Buddhist monks through their lived experiences, practices, contributions, and wisdom. However, the significance of the study rests on the belief that Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership styles, values, and practices could be learned and applied to other settings that would benefit anyone within a given community and society. This
phenomenological qualitative study is designed to provide answers to the following three specific research questions:

1. What are the essences of the lived-experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in spiritual leadership roles?

2. How do they describe their ethical and spiritual practices as spiritual leaders?

3. How do Vietnamese Buddhist monks perceive their roles in encouraging a spiritual life for those in leadership roles so they can effectively lead others?

The intentions and objectives of this qualitative study were to utilize the data gathered as well as the artifacts from the participants to further understand Vietnamese Buddhist monks and learn from their leadership styles and practices. Data were collected from 14 individuals who participated in the semi-structured personal interviews (see Appendices D), one focus group session, and discussions as well as an artifact review and personal research journal. The qualitative part of the survey was digitally recorded via QuickTime Player and iPhone’s voice memo as the backup. Out of 14 interviews, eight were conducted in English while six were conducted in Vietnamese, and the transcripts were later translated into English. It is essential to point out that all the interviews with the Most Venerables—the older monks who are at least 60 years old—were conducted in Vietnamese, plus Venerable Thich-Tue-Giac, who came to the United States 10 years ago. The rest of the interviews with other venerables—the younger monks—were conducted in English.

It is very important to note the research was intended to have interviews online via Skype or other popular 21st-century technological means. However, due to the random sampling and the participants’ ages (many of them are not technologically savvy)
most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. For instance, out of the 14 interviews, 12 were face-to-face interviews and two of them were conducted online. The online interviewees are with Venerable Thich-Dao-Quang of Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Venerable Thich-Tinh-Man of Morrison, Colorado. The random sampling methodology also led the researcher to travel up and down California in the course of four months to conduct interviews with the research participants to accumulate the data. The driving and flying were hectic, yet it was a unique and once-in-a-lifetime lived experience. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed from which the main themes emerged (see Figure 6). A brief profile of each participant follows.

**Profile of the Participants**

1. **Venerable Thich-Thien-Duyen or Thích Thiện Duyên.** Venerable Thich-Thien-Duyen is the Abbot of Kim Quang Temple in Sacramento, California, was ordained as a novice monk at the age of 10, and received his full ordination in 1990 in Vietnam. Venerable Thien-Duyen came to the United States in 1992 and studied in different Zen institutions. In 1994, Venerable Thien-Duyen established the center for Vietnamese Buddhists to practice in Buffalo, New York and became the spiritual leader of Tu Hieu Buddhist Cultural Center in Buffalo, New York. Venerable Thien-Duyen studied and practiced at Kim Son Monastery from 1995 until 2000. After five years of studying and helping at Kim Son Monastery, along with Venerable Thich-Phap-Chon, Venerable Thien-Duyen co-founded Lieu Quan Buddhist Cultural Center in San Jose in 2000. In 2001, Venerable Thien-Duyen became the Abbot of Kim Quang Temple and has held the presidency of the Vietnamese Buddhist Association of Sacramento since 2003. He has also been the spiritual advisor for Kim Quang Buddhist Youth Association
since 2001. Venerable Thien-Duyen attended several California community colleges, such as Gilroy Community College in Gilroy, American River College in Sacramento, and Diablo Valley Community College in Concord. He is currently pursuing a Bachelor’s degree. He has often said: “Practice mindfulness is living with the present moment.”

2. **Venerable Thich-Tue-Giac or Thích Tuệ Giác.** Venerable Thich-Tue-Giac is the Abbot of Dai Dang Monastery in Bansall, California and was ordained in Vietnam in 1986 with the well-known Vietnamese Zen Master, the Most Venerable Thich Thanh Tu. As a well trained Dharma teacher and leader in Vietnam, Venerable Tue-Giac was assigned to America to oversee the Dai Dang Meditation Center. Later, Venerable Tue-Giac became its Abbot in 2001 and has been the president of the Vietnamese Buddhist Meditation Congregation in America ever since. Venerable Tue-Giac’s approach to fellow Buddhists is respectful, buoyant, and praiseworthy. With his wisdom, virtue, and practice as well as his leadership, Venerable Tue-Giac is having a great impact on Buddhist communities, especially in the Vietnamese Buddhist communities in Bansall and the greater San Diego area.

3. **Venerable Thich-Tu-Luc or Thích Từ Lý.** Venerable Thich-Tu-Luc is the Abbot of Pho Tu Buddhist Temple, which is also known as the Compassion Meditation Center in Hayward, California. Venerable Tu-Luc is known for having a gentle and loving voice, invaluable devotion, and guidance for the Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Association in America. Venerable Thich-Tu-Luc is serving as spiritual advisor for the Compassion Meditation Center and several Buddhist youth groups in the Bay Area, including Thien Minh District Buddhist Youth Association, Chanh Tam Buddhist
Youth Association and Chanh Hoa Buddhist Youth Association in Northern California. Venerable Tu-Luc speaks passionately about the Buddhist Youth Association, mindfulness, and Zen. Recently, Venerable Tu-Luc established Trung Tam Tu Hoc Pho Tri (Wisdom Meditation Center) in Vacaville, California with the Mantra "Mindfulness is the Heart of Life." Venerable Tu-Luc earned a Bachelor’s degree in Creative Arts at California State University, San Francisco and has also pursued a Master’s degree at California State University, Hayward. One of his quotes is: “To follow in the path of the Buddha is to dedicate one’s life to the eradication of suffering and contribute to bringing peace to others.”

4. Venerable Thich-Phap-Chon or Thích Pháp Chơn. Venerable Phap-Chon is and has been the Abbot of Lieu Quan Buddhist Cultural Center in San Jose, California since 2001. In 2011, Venerable Phap-Chon founded the Metta Tu Tam Buddhist Heritage and Cultural Center in Morgan Hill, California. Venerable Phap-Chon holds a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology from the San Jose State University, with a minor in Sociology. Venerable Phap-Chon is also the founding president of the International Children Assistance Network (ICAN), a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization that serves children and their families in the Bay Area and in Vietnam. As the President of ICAN and chairman of the board directors, he has helped ICAN flourish throughout the years. On the ICAN’s website, it states:

Rev. Thich has helped to heal many broken souls, bringing peace and harmony to individuals and families, from those languishing in the refugee camps, to those living in despair and frustration in detention facilities, to those struggling to survive in the stressful, fast-paced society. His message on compassion and the practice of non-violence is well heeded by his disciples, the patrons who frequent Lieu Quan center, as well as countless students and adults, the abuser and the abused, the inmates, felons and juvenile delinquents who have met him. Under his
leadership, Lieu Quan has become, not just a place for religious services, but also an important source of community support for many people, young and old. (ICAN, 2014, para. 1)

6. Most Venerable Thich-Nguyen-Sieu or Thích Nguyên Siêu. Most Venerable Nguyễn Siêu is the Abbot of Phật Đà Temple and Pháp Vương Monastery in San Diego, California. Most Venerable Nguyễn Siêu was born in 1951 at Nha Trang, Khánh Hòa, Vietnam and became a novice monk in 1961 at the age of 10. Most Venerable Nguyễn Siêu studied extensively at different Buddhist schools such as Bồ Đề Buddhist School, Nha Trang (1966), Huệ Nghiêm Buddhist Institute, Sài Gòn (1968), Nguyên Thiều Buddhist Institute, Qui Nhơn, Bình Định (1969), and Hải Đức Buddhist Institute, Nha Trang (1970-71). Most Venerable Nguyễn Siêu was ordained in 1973 at Hải Đức Buddhist Institute, Nha Trang and studied there until 1975. In 1980, Most Venerable Nguyễn Siêu graduated with the equivalent of a Master’s degree at Tu Viện Quảng Hưởng Già Lam, Sài Gòn. As a boat person, Most Venerable Nguyễn Siêu escaped Vietnam to Palawan, Philippines in 1988 and settled in the United States in 1990. In 1996, Most Venerable Nguyễn Siêu established the Phật Đà Temple in San Diego, California and established the Pháp Vương Monastery in San Diego, California in 1999. He has held many important positions in the Vietnamese American United Buddhist Congregation, including the Editor-in-Chief of the Phật Việt magazine in 2004 and currently as the Secretary General of Vietnamese American United Buddhist Congregation in America. Most Venerable Nguyễn Siêu is a well known writer, poet, researcher, and leader. He shared:

All of us need to know how to live an artful life: Be flexible and humble as the bamboo trees, integrating and dissolving as the river, enduring and optimistic as the Mai tree, patient and forgiving as the earth, and selfless and free as the clouds.

7. Venerable Thich-Minh-Dung or Thích Minh Dung. Venerable Thích Minh-Dung is the Abbot of Quan Thien Temple in Ontario, California and Son Tung Zen
Monastery in Pheland, California. Venerable Minh-Dung was born in 1958 at Đĩnh Thiên village, Phước Quang, Tuy Phước district, Bình Định Province, Vietnam.

Venerable Minh-Dung became a novice monk at Nguyên Thiệu Monastery in Bình Định at the age of 11. In 1980, Venerable Minh-Dung went to Quang Hương Già Lam Buddhist Institute to study Buddhism for three years. Venerable Minh-Dung escaped Vietnam in 1983 by boat and resettled in America in 1985. From 1986 to 1994, Venerable Minh-Dung studied and obtained a Master’s degree in Sociology and was a general secretary for Chân Nguyên magazine from 1986 to 1999. Besides being a head monk, Venerable Minh-Dung works as a social worker in Southern California. Venerable Minh-Dung’s determination, dedication, and practices are making a significant difference in the community and he is a role model for many young Buddhists.

8. Most Venerable Thich-Minh-Dat or Thích Minh Đạt. The Most Venerable Thich-Minh-Dat was born in 1942. Most Venerable Minh-Dat is the Abbot of Quang Nghiem Temple in Stockton, California. Most Venerable Minh-Dat was ordained in 1960 and obtained an equivalent Master’s degree at Hue Nghiem Buddhist Institute from 1975-1977. Most Venerable Minh-Dat left Vietnam as a boat person and arrived in the United States in August 1979. He established the Vietnamese Buddhist Association of Stockton in 1983 and has been the Abbot of Quang Nghiem Temple in Stockton, California ever since. Most Venerable Minh-Dat is one of the oldest and most highly regarded Vietnamese Buddhist monks in Northern California. He serves as a spiritual advisor for the Vietnamese Buddhist Association of Stockton (Quang Nghĩm Temple) as well as for many other groups, including Lieu Quan District Buddhist Youth Association and Van Hanh Buddhist Youth Association in Northern California. For more than 35
years, Most Venerable Minh-Dat has been a spiritual advisor for thousands of individuals in Northern California and is truly a father figure to many. Here are two of Most Venerable Minh-Dat’s quotes that are important:

You need to have time to think and reflect both on the strengths and shortcomings of yourself and your organization. Seeking ideas from others and transforming them into something new.

Without wisdom and compassion, it is impossible for us to bring peace to the world; therefore, it is important that each of us should cultivate and practice wisdom and peace in our daily lives.

9. Most Venerable Thich-Thang-Hoan or Thích Thắng Hoan. Most Venerable Thang-Hoan was born in 1928 in Cần Thơ City in Southern Vietnam. Most Venerable Thang-Hoan started living at the temple at the age of eight with the Most Venerable Đắc Ngọc and became a novice monk in 1946 with the Most Venerable Thích Hoàn Thông. In that same year, Most Venerable Thang-Hoan’s master introduced him to the Most Venerable Thích Thiện Hòa when he studied at Phật Học Dương Nam Việt (Buddhist Institute) and Ân Quang Temple, Sài Gòn. Most Venerable Thang-Hoan was ordained in 1953 at Phật Học Dương Nam Việt (Buddhist Institute) at Ân Quang Temple and earned an undergraduate degree in 1957 and a Master’s degree in 1962. In 1963, Most Venerable Thang-Hoan was a lecturer and director at Biên Hòa Buddhist Institute. From 1964 to 1975, Most Venerable Thang-Hoan continued to teach and serve in the Buddhist Unified Church. Since then, Most Venerable Thang-Hoan has taught at many different schools, institutes, and temples/monasteries such as Bồ Đề, Dược Sư, Từ Nghiem, Hoa Quang, Huệ Lâm, Từ Thuyết, Giác Sanh, Phố Đức, Phật Ân in Vietnam. Most Venerable Thang-Hoan escaped Vietnam by boat in 1982 and settled at the Vietnam Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles, California in 1983. Since then, Most Venerable
Thang-Hoan has held many important positions with different Vietnamese Buddhist organizations, especially within the Vietnamese American United Buddhist Congregation. His influential teachers were the late Most Venerable Thích Thiện Hoa and the late Most Venerable Thích Đôn Hậu

10. Venerable Thich-Minh-Thien or Thích Minh Thiện. Venerable Thich-Minh-Thien is the Abbot of Trung Tam Tue Vien (Wisdom Garden Buddhist Center) in San Jose, California. Venerable Minh-Thien became a novice monk at the age of 11 and was ordained in Vietnam at the age of 23 and escaped Vietnam by boat in 1987. Venerable Minh-Thien arrived in America as a refugee in 1989. In 2004, Venerable Thich-Minh-Thien established Wisdom Garden Buddhist Center in San Jose, California. Besides all the obligations and responsibilities as a monk, Venerable Minh-Thien has also been studying and working since arriving in the United States. Venerable Thich-Minh-Thien earned a Bachelor’s degree and two Master’s degrees at San Jose State University. Venerable Minh-Thien’s Master’s degrees are in experimental psychology and counseling education. Venerable Minh-Thien used to work as a social worker and is currently an academic counselor at San Jose State University. Venerable Minh-Thien’s charity program called Bừa Com Tịnh Thương or Compassionate Meals, which feeds the homeless and hungry twice a month, attracts thousands of participants each year.

11. Most Venerable Thich-Thai-Sieu or Thích Thái Siêu. Most Venerable Thích-Thai-Sieu was ordained at the age of 13 in Vietnam and was well trained as a lecturer. After the Vietnam War, life was difficult for him and he did not have an opportunity to pursue a higher education for 22 years. Once the opportunity presented itself, Most Venerable Thai-Sieu went abroad to study. Most Venerable Thai-Sieu earned
several certificates in different fields. Most Venerable Thai-Sieu earned a Master’s degree and Ph.D. in Buddhism in India at the age of 57. After arriving in the United States in 2003, Most Venerable Thai-Sieu established and became Abbot of the Fremont Buddhist Center in Fremont, California. Most Venerable Thai-Sieu demonstrated leadership and commitment to earn a higher education degree and has inspired many of his colleagues and followers. One of Most Venerable Thai-Sieu’s famous quotes is “Use the big heart to do small task, but do not use the small heart to do the big task.”

12. Venerable Thich-Dao-Quang or Thích Dao Quang. Venerable Thich-Dao-Quang has been the Abbot of Tam Bao Buddhist Temple in Baton Rouge, Louisiana since 2003 and is known as the “country monk.” Venerable Dao-Quang is a lifelong learner who graduated from high school in Vietnam and earned a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology at Georgia State University in 2001 and a Master’s degree in Counseling at Southeastern Louisiana University in 2007. Currently, Venerable Dao-Quang is working on his Ph.D. in Health Psychology at Walden University. As a licensed therapist, Venerable Dao-Quang is teaching and integrating Mindfulness as a part of holistic healing. Venerable Dao-Quang speaks eloquently and deeply about the relationship between Buddhism, Eastern philosophy, and psychology. Venerable Dao-Quang is also known as a reformer in the Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Association and in the community. Here is one of Venerable Dao-Quang’s quotes: "If you practice well enough, you can see tremendous change in your life which benefits those around you. Change begins inside yourself."

13. Most Venerable Thich-Tinh-Tu or Thích Tịnh Tử. Most Venerable Thich-Tinh-Tu became a novice monk at the age of 14, studying under Patriarch Thich Vien
Giac, and was a well trained Dharma teacher in Vietnam. His Dharma Name is Nguyen Nguyen and pen name is Son Cu. He was trained at Giac Hai Monastery in Khanh Hoa province, Nha Trang city, Vietnam. In 1968, he graduated from undergraduate studies and continued his graduate school at the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies in Hue with the equivalent of a Master’s Degree in Buddhist Philosophy in 1971. Most Venerable Tinh-Tu is the Abbot of Kim Son Monastery, California and came to the United States as a scholar in 1974. Most Venerable Tinh-Tu has not been back to Vietnam since the Vietnam War ended. In 1981, he graduated from the University of San Francisco, California with degrees in Western Philosophy and Clinical Psychology. Most Venerable Tinh-Tu’s leadership goals and visions are to be able to train more nuns and monks in America.

In 1976, Most Venerable Tinh-Tu established Tu Quang Temple, in San Francisco, California. In 1983, he established Kim Son Monastery on Mt. Madonna, Watsonville, California. In 2006, he established Lien Tri Monastery on Mt. Vernon, Alabama. In 2010, another monastery was established, called the Thon Yen Meditation Center in Gilroy, California. In 2012, he also founded Quan Am Nam Hai Monastery in Panama City, Florida. He also plays advisor roles for other temples, Buddhist groups, monasteries, and meditation centers throughout the United States. He is highly regarded in the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition with his wisdom, compassion and leadership skills. As a Zen master, Most Venerable Tinh-Tu has transformed many lives, old and young, sick and healthy.

Tinh-Man studied and received a monastic education at the Plum Village in France and was ordained in 1995. Later on, Venerable Tinh-Man received a Lamp Transmission from Thich Nhat Hanh’s Zen tradition in 1999. From 2004 to 2006, Venerable Tinh-Man was the acting Abbot and Adviser for An Bang Buddhist Temple in Denver, Colorado. Venerable Tinh-Man established the Compassionate Dharma Cloud Monastery in Morrison, Colorado in 2006 and since then has held the title of Abbot. Venerable Tinh-Man earned a Bachelor’s degree in psychology and held a Master’s degree in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism from the Naropa University in 2007. Currently, he is pursuing a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology.

To ensure there were enough willing participants in this study, the researcher sent out a synopsis and an introduction to about 20 potential participants. The researcher presented the case and process to the first participant, Venerable Thich-Thien-Duyen–the Abbot of Kim Quang Temple in Sacramento, California. After the initial interview, the snowball sampling took place until the research sample reached the saturation point of 14 participants.

As presented earlier, three research questions were used throughout the study to guide this qualitative phenomenological research. The discussions in Chapter 4 are structured around the data collected from the 14 personal interviews, a focus-group session, and artifact analysis. The artifacts are the essays, books, videos, and pictures the research participants gave to or shared with researchers. There were instances in which the researcher asked the participants to take pictures of related events for additional evidence. To recruit respondents for the qualitative part of this qualitative study, emails, text messages, and phone calls were extended to prospective participants regarding the
semi-structured questions utilized both in the focus-group sessions and personal interviews.

The basic demographic questionnaire was used to collect information from the respondents, which was used as a quantitative measurement. The information gathered included age, years ordained, years since arriving in the United States, and their educational level. For example, of 14 Vietnamese Buddhist monks, their combined age is 827 years. The combined years they have been living in America is 364 years and they had the combination of 513 years of practice. They also established 22 Buddhist temples, monasteries, or practice centers. The information was recorded, organized, analyzed, and summarized in tabular forms (see Tables 2 and 3, respectively).
Table 2

*Age, Years Ordained, and Years of Mindfulness Practice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th># Years in United States</th>
<th># Years Ordained</th>
<th>Age entered Training/Temple</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ven. Thich-Thien-Duyen</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Ven. Thich-Tu-Luc</td>
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<td>Ven. Thich-Hanh-Tuan</td>
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<td>Ven. Thich-Phap-Chon</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Ven. Thich-Minh-Dung</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Most Ven. Thich-Minh-Dat</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>54</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Most Ven. Thich-Thang-Hoan</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>61</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Ven. Thich-Minh-Thien</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Most Ven. Thich-Thai-Sieu</td>
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<td>Most Ven. Thich-Tinh-Tu</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Ven. Thich-Tinh-Man</td>
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<td>28</td>
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</tbody>
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## Table 3

*Years in America, Years Established Temple, and Years became Abbot*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th># Years in United States</th>
<th>Years Established Temple</th>
<th>Year became Abbot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ven. Thich-Thien-Duyen</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Co-founder of Lieu Quan Buddhist Cultural Center in 2001</td>
<td>Abbot 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ven. Thich-Tue-Giac</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2001 - Dai Dang Meditation Center</td>
<td>Abbot 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ven. Thich-Tu-Luc</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1986 – Hayward Meditation Center</td>
<td>Abbot 1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000 – Pho Tu Temple – Compassion Meditation Center</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2012 – Pho Tri Practice Center</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ven. Thich-Phap-Chon</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Founder of Lieu Quan Buddhist Cultural Center in 2000, San Jose, CA</td>
<td>Abbot 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Established Metta Tu Tam Buddhist Heritage and Cultural Center in 2011, Morgan Hills, CA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ven. Thich-Minh-Dung</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Founder of Quang Thien Temple, 2000; Son Tung Monastery, 2012</td>
<td>Abbot 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Most Ven. Thich-Minh-Dat</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Founder of Quang Nghiêm Temple of Stockton, CA in 1983</td>
<td>Abbot 1983</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th># Years in United States</th>
<th>Years Established Temple</th>
<th>Year became Abbot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Most Ven. Thich-Thai-Sieu</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Established Fremont Buddhist Center in Fremont, CA in 2009</td>
<td>Abbot 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ven. Thich-Dao-Quang</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Residing at Tam Bao Temple of Baton Rouge, Louisiana since 2003</td>
<td>Abbot 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Most Ven. Thich-Tinh-Tu</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Founder of Tu Quang Pagoda, San Francisco, CA; Kim Son Monastery in Watsonville, CA; Lien Tri Monastery, AL; Nam Hai Quan Am, FL; and Thon Yen Pagoda, Gilroy, CA</td>
<td>Abbot 1983</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All participants in the personal interviews and focus group sessions gave their permission to the researcher to use participant names, video, artifacts, and quotes, and other identifying information in the document. The findings of personal interviews and the focus group session were coded and analyzed for final analysis and discussion (Saldana, 2012). In Vivo Coding and Values Coding were used because both are appropriate for interpreting “interview transcripts as a method of attuning yourself to participant language, perspective, and worldviews” (Saldana, 2012, p. 48). Pattern Coding and Focused Coding were used for categorization as analytic strategy (Saldana, 2012). The study utilized the triangulation methodology for data collection to ensure accuracy during data analysis.
Findings

The findings of the phenomenological research study are represented in this section of the chapter. Three main themes, addressed below, were apparent during the analysis of the data from the transcripts extracted from the 14 semi-structured personal interviews, a focus group session, researcher’s personal research journal, and artifacts as presented by the research participants—Vietnamese Buddhist monks residing in the United States.

The raw data were transcribed, coded, and organized in a concept mapping styling for each of the monks. The interview script of each monk was transcribed, summarized, and organized in a concept map (Figures 9-21 at the end of Chapter 5). The concept map has five main sub-sections: (a) Biographical information/background, (b) Beliefs, (c) Practices, (d) Lived-experiences, and (e) Leadership styles and Characteristics. Each of the sub-sections has four to six other sub-findings that expand the outcomes of each category. All 14 concept maps were compared and cross-examined, which ultimately lead to the three prominent themes and 14 sub-themes that will be addressed.

Finally, the three main themes noticed from the analysis are as follows: (a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America and their lived-experiences are dynamic, unique, and positively contribute to society because of their spiritual leadership roles and obligations; (b) the monks’ leadership styles are characterized as authentically leading by example and basing decisions upon the core values of mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom; and (c) through their practices, their presence, and their contributions to the welfare of others, they bring about peace of mind and happiness for themselves and for others in society. Each of the three major findings, along with the respective sub-findings
are shown in Figure 6. These sub-findings are explained, explored and analyzed in detail throughout this chapter.

**Main Themes and Sub-findings**

**Mindful Leadership - A Phenomenological Study of Vietnamese Buddhist Monks in America with Respect to their Spiritual Leadership Roles and Contributions to Society**

1. **Vietnamese Buddhist Monks in America and their lived-experiences are dynamic, unique, and contribute to the society because of their spiritual leadership roles and obligations.**
   - a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America joined monkhood at a young age and escaped or immigrated to the United States due to different circumstances.
   - b) Vietnamese Buddhist monks take Bodhisattva vows that dedicate their lives for the benefit of others.
   - c) Their monkhood is challenging and they must overcome many obstacles.
   - d) They learn from their own masters, practicing Buddha doctrines and shaping their own beliefs and practices to empower themselves and others.
   - e) Their contributions and influences are mostly to the local communities and surrounding areas, especially to the Vietnamese communities as well as the Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Associations throughout the United States of America.
   - f) They are content with who they are, and they are happy with what they are doing in the present time and circumstance.

2. **Their leadership style is characterized as authentically leading by example, basing decisions upon the core values of mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom.**
   - a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America learned from the living example of their masters and lead-by-example themselves.
   - b) They practice meditation daily and are mindful of their thinking and actions that contribute to their leadership characteristics.
   - c) Their practices are based upon being compassionate to themselves and other beings for the benefit of themselves and others in the present and in the future.
   - d) They balance their hectic schedule with mindfulness and lead the congregation, laypersons, and others.

3. **Through their practices, their presence, and their contributions to the welfare of others, they bring about peace of mind and happiness for themselves and for others in society.**
   - a) The foundation for peace in the Vietnamese Buddhist monks and others is the mindset of the Bodhisattva (making a difference for all beings) and is the practice of precepts, which transform negative into positive thoughts and actions.
   - b) Their practices of calming the mind, opening the heart and soul, and seeing others as their colleagues, collaborators, and teachers brings peace-of-mind, optimism, and loving-kindness.
   - c) Their own happiness, which is fundamental to their leadership and spiritual roles, depends upon their daily activities and mindfulness practice.
   - d) They are humble regarding their contributions and lead with their sincere good-hearted intentions.

*Figure 6.* Main themes and sub-findings of this study.
1. Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America and their lived-experiences are
dynamic, unique, and positively contribute to the society because of their spiritual
leadership roles and obligations.

All the participants in this phenomenological qualitative study shared their lived-
experiences, stories, beliefs, and practices. The main themes that emerged are as follows:
(a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America joined the monkhood at a young age and
immigrated to the United States due to different circumstances; (b) Vietnamese Buddhist
monks take Bodhisattva vows dedicating their lives for the benefit of others; (c) Their
monkhood is challenging and they must overcome many obstacles; (d) They learn from
their own masters, practicing Buddhist doctrines and shaping their own beliefs and
practices to empower themselves and others; (e) Their contributions and influences are
mostly to the local communities and surrounding areas, especially to the Vietnamese
communities as well as the Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Associations throughout the
United States of America; and (f) They are content with who they are, and they are happy
with what they are doing in the present time and circumstances.

a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America joined monkhood at a young age
and escaped or immigrated to the United States due to different circumstances.

Most of the study participants came to the temple at a very young age, ranging from 7 to
26 years of age. The demographic information in Table 2 highlighted the average age of
the 14 participants as joining a temple for official training at approximately 15.2 years of
age. After many years of training as novice monks, monks are equipped to take on the
role of Abbot. In fact, the average years of ordination (to dedicate their whole life to
service others) was 36.64 and the Abbot’s average age was 59 years old.
A three-dimensional bar graph representation of Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ ages, number of years ordained, and years spent in the United States can be seen in Figure 7.

![Bar graph](image)

**Figure 7.** Age, years in America, and years ordained.

This graph reveals an overview of all biographical information of all the participants. This information is a useful starting point for understanding them in greater depth as this research presents itself. The first research participant in this study is Venerable Thien-Duyen of Kim Quang Buddhist Temple of Sacramento, who tipped off the snowball sampling. Venerable Thien-Duyen, a leader in the community, recalled that he entered the monastic life at the age of 10. He shared:

I started novice training when I was 10 years old, and before that, I loved to live with the monks in the mountains. On the weekends or in the summer, I spent time with my uncle in a mountain temple. At the age of 10, I really wanted to become a Buddhist monk. To become a monk you need to get permission from your parents. So when my Master asked me to seek for the permission to become a
monk, I needed to talk to my parents for permission, but at that time my parents, in my case, you know... At that time was the Vietnamese-American war, so my Dad was in a prison of the Communist party in North Vietnam and my Mom lived in South Vietnam, and I was in Central Vietnam with my grandfather, and so I could not ask my parents’ permission, but I asked my grandfather, and he allowed me to become a monk.

Similarly, the Most Venerable Nguyen-Sieu, the Abbot of Phat Da Buddhist Temple and Phap Vuong Monastery Center in San Diego, entered the temple at 10 years of age. In 1988, Most Venerable Nguyen-Sieu left Vietnam by boat and arrived at Palawan, Philippines. After two years as a refugee, Most Venerable Nguyen-Sieu settled in the United States of America in 1990. Likewise, Venerable Hanh-Tuan of Truc Lam Buddhist Temple in Chicago, Illinois echoed in more detail:

I became a novice monk when I was 14 years old. I practiced mindfulness since then and [was] surprised that I was quite eager to learn mindfulness; I came to a temple in Hoi An city, Quang Nam province, Vietnam. My master gave me a book to practice meditation, called the Daily Chanting Handbook or Từ Bược Nở Hoa Sen – A Lotus Flower Blooming Under Each Step written by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. In that handbook, my master reminded me that in every daily action from the moment I wake until the time I go to bed, I need to recite the Gatha to remind myself, “whatever you do, you need to be mindful.” So, I have been practicing mindfulness for almost 42 years.

The findings indicate that the majority of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks came to the temples as novice monks (at a very young age) and learned under the supervision of their masters, who taught them the practices of meditation, Kệ or Gatha, and chanting. They lived a monastic life ever since. Even though the Vietnam War (known to most Vietnamese as the American War) ended on April 30, 1975, the war affected all the participants in this research one way or another. Most of them became refugees and escaped Vietnam by boat, including Most Venerable Thich-Minh-Dat. Most Venerable Minh-Dat left Vietnam in 1978 as a boat person, as did Venerable Tu-Luc, Venerable
Minh-Dung, Venerable Phap-Chon, and the Most Venerable Nguyen-Sieu. Venerable Minh-Thien added, “I escaped by boat in 1987 and lived in a refugee camp for a year and a half, and then I immigrated to the U.S. in 1989.” Even younger monks were affected.

Venerable Thich-Tinh-Man of Morrison, Colorado shared his story:

In 1976, my family and I were forced by the North Vietnamese government to relocate to the remote areas in the highlands of Vietnam. At seven years old, I braved the harsh and unforgiving environment of this undeveloped land. Fever was rampant, which was caused by toxins from Agent Orange. These chemicals made the water toxic and lead to many deaths amongst the villagers who were attempting to cultivate the land that was filled with dangerous snakes, mosquitoes, scorpions and other various wild animals of the jungle.

In efforts to escape the North Vietnamese communist regime, at the age of 15, along with my father, younger brother, and several other close friends and relatives, we made the long journey to the refugee camps in Hong Kong. The "boat people" as we were called, endured rough seas, famine, and atrocities of sea pirates that plagued throughout that area of the oceans. My family lived in the refugee camps in Hong Kong for 16 months to await for the appropriate immigration documents and interviews with representatives of the American Embassy. Due to my malnourished and frail physique, I appeared only nine years old to the interviewers. Having lost all forms of identification, my true age was never fully determined. Since I spent the many childhood years attempting to survive the harsh realities of war torn Vietnam, I did not receive an education and was unable to read or write. During my duration at the camp, I committed myself to learn how to read and write on my own. My mornings started at 4:00 a.m. and consisted of physical exercise and the rest of the day was reserved for learning both English and Vietnamese. After a year and a half in Hong Kong, my father, my little brother and I were transferred to the Philippine's for six months to study English and learn about the American culture, which was a prerequisite prior coming to the United States.

Venerable Tu-Luc of Hayward, California recalled his experience in the new land at a military camp in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas in May 1975:

One day in the middle of the night, I woke up staring at the white painted wall and realized that I was at a refugee camp in the US. It was no longer the familiar places of barbed wire, tents, and streets of a war-torn country. I then remembered the sad and tragic ending followed by a trip full of famine, difficulties, and with no destination; I knew my life would be totally different from now on. Tears ran
down my cheeks when I thought of my unfortunate destiny in this far away land. I cried until I could not cry anymore.

Venerable Hanh-Tuan also emphasized, “When we were growing up, during the Vietnam War, there was not much learning or teaching in Vietnam. Buddhism there at that time was just a ritual, just praying.” Life was difficult as the Most Venerable Thai-Sieu noted, “After the war, I didn’t have the opportunity to go to school or to get a higher education for 22 years.”

The Vietnam War ended when the communists came to power after the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. All the Vietnamese Buddhist monks in this research eventually resettled in America since then except for the Most Venerable Tinh-Tu of Kim Son Monastery who stayed in the United States when he was studying abroad in 1974. Vietnamese Buddhist monks brought with them different Buddhist traditions and practices, including mindfulness meditation, Zen, Pure Land, and Mantric practices.

Overall, the majority of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks came to the temple at an early age to learn, practice, and apply Buddhism to their lives and to the world. The monks left Vietnam, their native country, for many reasons due to their personal and family circumstances. Despite different and various circumstances, most of the research participants were ordained in Vietnam and resettled in the United States since 1974. Each of them now plays a major role, not only in the Vietnamese American Buddhist communities, but also in the America Buddhist communities in their respective locales.

b) Vietnamese Buddhist monks take Bodhisattva vows dedicating their lives for the benefit of others. All the monks were ordained after a period of monastic training. The monks took the monastic training code and Bodhisattva vows to dedicate
their lives to helping humanity. For instance, the average age of the monks being ordained was 25.6 years old, which was a very mature age in their thoughts and actions. The following statements highlight some thoughts as to why each monk was ordained.

As Venerable Tinh-Man recalled, “I founded the Compassionate Dharma Cloud Monastery in 2006 so I may carry on contemplative practice and teach everything that I have been taught and trained in as a monk in my years of schooling.” As a dedicated monk, Tinh-Man is still taking courses at Argosy University to earn a Master’s Degree in Family and Marriage Therapy. Venerable Tinh-Man’s goal is to:

Share the Dharma with 'ALL' members of the community. Since I understand clearly that human suffering is pervasive and the stress of our daily lives debilitates our experience for joy, peace, and happiness.

Venerable Thich-Tinh-Man continued, “My intent is to invite everyone to the monastery to have a place of refuge and a moment of stillness to return to one's own heart and mind.” Venerable Hanh-Tuan added that taking Bodhisattva vows is the practice of Engaged Buddhism. He explained:

I believe Engaged Buddhism is the practice in which people carry out the compassionate teaching of the Buddha. They must possess the value of compassion and wisdom. Without wisdom, there is no real compassion. Zen cultivates the field of wisdom and applies Buddhism’s theory and philosophy into practical daily action, and not only belief or chanting. Engaged Buddhism brings the real practice into our society.

According to Venerable Dao-Quang (Vietnamese American Buddhist practitioner), the practice of Buddhism is for the benefit of all. However, he also noted that one just has to carry out:

The Listen-Think-Practice approach, which is a traditional method of studying Buddhism; the challenge for most of us is having a true understanding of Listen-Think-Practice and how to correctly apply it so that it is beneficial to our daily practice. If one can listen, think, and practice correctly in accordance with the
Right Dharma, he/she will reap much benefit to himself, his family and society. On the other hand, a person who listens, thinks and practices incompletely will not bring benefits to himself or to those around him.

He emphasized:

If we examine closely, we will see that the root cause of most problems that separate people including the disconnect between family members, friends, teacher and students, and countries being at war; is the fact that people are not practicing deep listening, not understanding each other, not having Wise Thinking. People are more interested in discussing the characters of true understanding rather than actually practicing to live with true understanding.

He urged:

We have the audacity to look within ourselves, to look closely at our organization, and together we can build the foundation for Deep Listening-Thinking-Practicing. thus enabling ourselves to improve our lives, families, organizations, community, and society. Each individual has to change and improve the way he/she listens, thinks, understands, and lives righteously before asking others to change. When we change, other things will also change accordingly, and whether these are significant or insignificant change depends on our own capability to practice and improve.

Not only are the Vietnamese Buddhist monks determined to dedicate their lives for the better good for themselves and for others, they also devote themselves to bringing their practices into a fruitfulness in order to benefit all. These monks are clearly motivated by a strong sincere desire to help others, which represents the basic Buddhist doctrine. Venerable Minh-Thien, a social worker and an academic advisor at San Jose State University, also pointed out what the Buddhist monks called Bodhisattva vows:

I took the Bodhisattva vows. You do not just live, but contribute. I believe as leaders that we should have some sort of spirit of service and spiritual service. We need to serve others. That is what the Bodhisattva vows are about. We need to have spirit goal; to live to serve... Buddha believed in interdependence. We don't exist here alone. Everything we have is a contribution from other people, and you yourself are a part of that contribution as well. We [are] part of the whole; therefore, we need to give back. You don't just take, you have to give back as well. And that's another value that I strongly believe in. The spiritual mentality we should have is to be able to serve others. If you live without purpose
then it’s a life wasted. Additionally, your purpose in life isn’t to only focus on your own happiness, but also to care and serve others. You will never be truly happy if you only think about yourself; you are a part of this community that depends on each other for the well-being of all.

He continued that the main purpose (or the philosophy of life) is living a good life where making a difference to oneself and others is the priority and a privilege. He said:

To have a good life, you should provide service to others, and like Buddha said, “It's all about interdependence, conditions. When conditions come together, and, right in that moment, you become that.” Now I strongly believe in helping others and that is why I have become ordained so I can dedicate my life for the benefit of others. That's my solid belief because I know that's the purpose of my life.

All the participants shared similar inspirations to help, ease suffering, and bring happiness to others. The participants in the focus-group session also specifically emphasized this point. Findings from the questionnaire provided additional evidence on their dedication with the following testimony: “Dharma (the teaching of Buddha) not only allows us to realize the causes of Dukkha (suffering), but it also shows us the way of easing suffering and cultivating the state of beings: happiness and peace.” The conclusions drawn from blending the findings of the survey, focus group, and personal interviews indicate a commitment to practice the Bodhisattva vows, which are the devotion, determination, and action to help all beings. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks took these vows at the average age of 25.6 years, which showed they were mature in their decisions and their devotion to live a beneficial life for all sentient beings. The act of taking Bodhisattva vows reveals the determination and the spirit of service for the greater benefit of all beings. That is what is commonly understood in Buddhism as the heart and mind of a great leader.
c) Their monkhood is challenging and they must overcome many obstacles.

Being a monk is not an easy task; it is often called the Ly gia cát ái, the “separating from family and terminating of an attachment” with the world. The following discussion is from one of the youngest monks, Venerable Thich-Tinh-Man, who recalled his early novice-hood:

In my first year in Hawaii, I lived at Chan Khong Buddhist Monastery while attending Kalani High School. In this challenging period of my life, I studied as a Buddhist apprentice under the guidance of Abbot Thích Thông Hải. The living condition in the monastery was excruciating. A contribution to the mortgage and bills was a necessity to sustain the monastery. I took a job at Burger King making $4.25 an hour and closed the store at 1:00 a.m. for three nights of the school week. I took the public bus and arrived at the bottom foothill of the monastery at 2:00 a.m. From there I would walk a mile and a half uphill in the midst of the dimly lit streets. Depending on the amount of guests staying at the monastery, I often either slept in the library, beside the ancestor altar, in the garage, or inside the community van. The days started at 4:30 a.m. with personal hygiene followed by a 5:00 a.m. meditation practice and sutra chanting. I would then take the public bus at 7:00 a.m. to make my way to school. I kept this course, as an apprentice, until I graduated high school. In the beginning of this apprenticeship training, there were six other teenagers, including my younger brother. Five practitioners found it too overbearing and withdrew their aspirations to be a novice. I was the only practitioner to be ordained by my teacher Thích Thông Hải as a novice student in 1994.

The findings show the obstacles, both emotional and social, which a typical monk had to overcome. Likewise, the Most Venerable Thang-Hoan – the oldest participant, who has worked and advised many Buddhist organizations – recollected that he became a novice monk at the of eight in the Mekong Delta in Southern Vietnam in 1933: “I was born in Cần Thơ City, but became a novice monk at Phước Hậu Temple in Trà Vinh; my master sent me to the big city to study with Most Venerable Thích Thien Hoa.” Most Venerable Thang-Hoan stated that it was quite a challenging and difficult time for him. Venerable Dao-Quang also recalled his early inspiring, yet funny, monkhood experience:
In 1991, I tried to convince my best friend – who had already, at that time, become a Buddhist monk – to disrobe; but I was not successful. Later on I thought I would like to understand why he chose to follow Buddhism, and I then found that this is the path I wanted to walk on. I joined the Zen monastery when I was 22 years old and followed the instructions of Zen Master Thich Thanh Tu, who later became the most well-known Vietnamese Buddhist Zen Master in the Vietnam.

Venerable Minh-Thien, a lifelong learner and academic advisor, described an experience as follows:

At first, it was not easy at all, because I did not think about forming a center to become an Abbot or a spiritual leader/advisor. I just wanted to become a simple residential monk at a temple with simple daily task. I didn't want to have any sort of leadership position or role as a spiritual teacher. But then, like Buddha said, it's all about interdependence and conditions. When conditions come together, and you right in that moment, you become that. But now I just strongly believe in helping others. Like right here, I dedicate my life for the benefit of others. That's my solid belief because I feel like that's the purpose in my life.

The stories and narratives from the participants in the focus-group sessions and personal interviews were validated by answers in the interviews and artifacts collected. For instance, Venerable Tu-Luc wrote a book titled *Why did I become a monk?* In it, Venerable Tu-Luc mentioned stories from childhood that not only revealed the difficulties he faced as a novice monk, but also provided evidence of how harsh life in Central Vietnam was in the early 1970s. The findings revealed that all the Vietnamese Buddhist monks had to overcome many adversities and challenges to become contented leaders. Although they struggled, they were nevertheless determined to continue their vows and work hard to overcome the challenges they faced, gaining greater awareness of the values of persistence and of courage in the face of adversity. This greater experience is what enhances their spiritual leadership. Monkhood is no small task and requires
patience, compassion, and determination, which are life skills for success that all leaders need in all settings.

d) They learn from their own masters, practicing Buddha doctrines and shaping their own beliefs and practices to empower themselves and others. The first learning experiences of the monks came from the first impression and teachings of their masters. For most monks, they were given little or no formal education in terms of monastic training. The participants, however, acknowledged receiving the love, support, and teaching from their masters, but proper training was not systematic. As a result, the monks often had to rely on self-learning. Venerable Tue-Giac of Dai Dang Monastery in San Diego made the following remarks:

Ever since I met Venerable [Thich Thanh Tu], with his direct teaching and guidance, I was able to apply the teachings and attain happiness. As for the leadership style, I just follow the guidelines, policies, and what my Master taught and has already set for all the Zen Monasteries, although I still have to be open-minded to adapt to the environment, conditions, and culture. In Buddhism, they call it right condition, right location, and right timing. Which means foremost it has to fit with the teaching of Buddha, but it also has to fit with the ability of the recipient, one’s own potential. In addition, it has to be practical, well timed, and at the right places. Altogether, as long as I can bring the benefits, which I gained, from others through the practice and delivered it to others so they can learn, understand, and apply it for themselves.

Venerable Hanh-Tuan, a dedicated monk and scholar, made the following statement:

My master in Vietnam have taught me a method of meditation that was transmitted down directly from the Buddha to my great-great grand master. He constantly reminded me that I needed to be committed to the practice of meditation diligently. Since then, I have been practicing meditation, but did not officially go to any Zen Monastery to learn the method. What I learned, I have learned from my master in Vietnam.

Venerable Dao-Quang of Louisiana also learned meditation and mindfulness when he first came to a temple. He shared:
Practicing mindfulness helps me see things as they are so I can be an objective leader without prejudice or personal bias. When making a decision, I do not allow myself to rely on my own interest or subjective feeling, but instead I make a decision based on objective reality and the need of our organization at the moment.

Venerable Thien-Duyen recalled that he learned and practiced Mahayana tradition. “In Mahayana Buddhism, we practice both Zen and Pure Land, but with me, Zen and Pure Land are from the mind, from meditation. So the core of my practice is meditation.” Furthermore, he shared his practice of Noble Silence and that his style depended on interactions and people. Venerable Thien-Duyen said, “It depends on how much they practice. When they are newcomers, I would interact and use more verbal communication. The second level, I don't need to say as much, less speech.” He continued, but if “they are the advanced level, just by looking, they know. But overall, you need to practice by breathing, being patient, and to open your heart to love and understand them.”

In the early 1980s, the Venerable Tue-Giac, who benefited from the wisdom and method of practices acquired from his renowned teacher and Zen Master, the Most Venerable Thich Thanh Tu, was grateful he received that kind of training. Venerable Minh-Thien further mentioned:

You get to understand that meditation has many forms, not just one. If you really practice it, you will see that there are many, many ways of practicing meditation; including the Vipassana or other forms like Mahayana. But, of course, there are basic instructions on how to do it, but when you actually put it into practice, you then learn how to articulate the philosophy around that form of meditation. Meditation is not a means to achieve something. It's not a means to an end. It's an end by itself.

The Most Venerable Minh-Dat, a participant in one of the personal interviews, acknowledged the important role meditation plays in empowering inner peace and
happiness. He shared what he learned from the old tradition his master passed on.

According to Most Venerable Minh-Dat:

There are three main branches in Vietnamese Buddhism - Thiền (Meditation/Zen), Tịnh Độ (Pure Land), and Mật Tông (Tantric). There are people who practice both Thiền and Pure Land. Then, there are those who combine both Thiền and Tantric Buddhism. My practice focuses mainly on Pure Land but also a component of meditation. We use Buddhist chanting and prayers to heal one’s own delusions. Once the delusions have settled, one does not need prayers any longer. One can just look deeply, using meditation methods such as focusing on your breath and/or being mindful of the five Skandhas. However, meditation is only a secondary part of the practice. If one’s mind is scattered, then one needs to come back to prayers. There are three kinds of prayers—vocal prayers, silent prayers, and praying in your heart/mind.

The Most Venerable Tinh-Tu discussed the concept of teaching and leading by example and how one must go through the Four Virtues for oneself: “(1) Moral compassion (altruism); (2) awakening/static moral sense (control concept oneself); (3) learning based on religious beliefs and teachings of the Buddha; and (4) equanimity (education on the spiritual dimension) for Buddhists.” In addition, Most Venerable Tinh-Tu had applied four principles to win the hearts and minds of others: “Loving speech, cultivating compassion, respecting the collective interest, and benefiting others.”

The discoveries highlight how the quality of learning from the monk masters was deeply engrained in the young monks’ hearts and minds. Moreover, the lack of any formal training in monastic training programs in Vietnam made this teaching and learning-by-example experience relevant and invaluable. Yet, all the participants were able to empower themselves by practicing mindfulness and meditation. Practicing meditation leads to equanimity, which is a calm state that helps absorb disappointment, chaos, and shock. Often, whatever the stimulants are, individuals tend to be reactive (reacting to situations) by instinct, but when individuals practice meditation or being
mindful, individuals tend to be calm. Meditation helps individuals be responsive to the stimulants or situations, rather than being reactive. Thus, meditation leads to equanimity, a source of calmness, strength, and inner peace. Meditation is a profound resource for spiritual development, individual growth, and spiritual practice.

Vietnamese Buddhist monks learned the finest practices from their masters. That best practice is the inner nature of meditation practitioners. Understanding and experiencing meditation leads to wisdom, Vietnamese Buddhist monks taught their students by examples of their thoughts, actions, and spirit. The findings show that the research participants learned well from their specific master and practiced meditation diligently. They also selected all the best practices available and merged them together to form their own practices. The practices they devised are well tested and based upon the foundation of interdependence, compassion, wisdom, and courage, which make their lived-experiences dynamic and unique.

e) Their contributions and influences are mostly to the local communities and surrounding areas, especially to the Vietnamese communities as well as the Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Associations throughout the United States of America. All the participants are Abbots of their local temples or Zen centers. These centers are in the Mahayana tradition and often support surrounding communities where these locations serve as cultural centers, community centers, Vietnamese language schools, and character educational centers along with other functions. Besides that, a majority of the participants are the spiritual advisors of their respective communities, including Vietnamese Buddhism Youth Association, a non-profit organization that emphasizes not
only virtue, moral, ethical, and inner values, but also focuses on physical education, character education, and spiritual education of Buddhist youth (GDPT Viet Nam, 2008).

It is pertinent to note that their contributions are not uniform, despite being Buddhist in foundation. Venerable Hanh-Tuan of Truc Lam Temple in Chicago, Illinois pointed out that many temples in Vietnamese Buddhist do not have an organized or structured membership, but still contribute as best they can. He said:

Basically, in Vietnamese Buddhism, we don’t have membership. That is the problem. Back then, we had about 100 members come every Sunday, 60 of which were the youth members and 40 were the adult members. Nowadays, there are about 200 people who come regularly every week. There are only some Americans who come to the practice, but mostly Vietnamese.

Venerable Tu-Luc of Hayward, California—a spiritual advisor for three different Vietnamese Buddhist Associations in Northern California—recalled:

People called me the ‘backpack’ monk back then. I would borrow bags full of books from the library to read and that is how I learned for two years. I read all the Vietnamese books that I could find in that library. Then I read all the books my Venerable Master Thich Nhat Hanh had written. I had the feeling that if I wanted to become a monk, I should work with the younger generation.

I work with different temples, especially I concentrate my energy with the youth, especially Vietnam Buddhist youth because I think the young generation is very important. If we can help them grow in a good way, then they will be a big benefit for the society. Up to now, we have a chance to work with American people too through many retreats. My main concern, my main appetite, is still to work with the people who value mindfulness practices.

He continued:

I also learned from Venerable Master Thich Nhat Hanh’s tradition. This tradition of meditation focuses on how to integrate practices into our daily life. Meditation means mindfulness and concentration through four postures: sitting, walking, lying, and standing too, Di Đẳng Nam Ngồi. For me, I try to apply this method of practice in my lifestyle: no matter what I do, I do so with mindfulness.
As Vietnamese Buddhist monks, practicing mindfulness while leading by example is crucial for all laypersons, especially for the youths to emulate. The monks guide the youth to practice the Five Trainings of Buddhist Youth Association. These five trainings are the foundation to having a healthy, spiritual, and happy life:

I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha and practice the five precepts
I open my heart of compassion and respect the lives of all living beings.
I cultivate my wisdom and honor the truth.
I practice purity, physically and spiritually, in my speech and action.
I practice joy and equanimity with diligence in my Buddhist training. (GDPT Viet Nam, 2008)

By the same token, Venerable Dao-Quang of Baton Rouge, Louisiana looked at a similar alternative approach:

We have to teach our youths how to quiet their mind before they do anything, so that they can increase their concentration. For me, the good educational systems not only provide the valuable knowledge, but also offer a positive behavior system. I see the weakness in our society that we emphasize so much on knowledge but were not providing the tools for students for when something goes wrong, they don’t know how to cope. They react, you see. I want to train my students how to be mindful and respond rather than reactive on anything based on emotion.

For other older laypersons, abiding to the precepts, reciting Buddhas’ names and chanting Sutras are often the main practices; Venerable Hanh-Tuan of Chicago, Illinois mentioned:

I think the majority of laypersons come to practice chanting. Their minds are always wandering and disturbed by many different things out there. I often remind them, like Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh reminded us, that we need to be mindful of every moment. Dwelling in the present moment is a gift to not think about the past or the future. Dwell in peacefulness that lies in this present moment. Life is in this moment. Actually, that is the teaching of the Buddha.

Venerable Phap-Chon of San Jose, California mentioned a need of blending the old and new and from different traditions. He shared:

Actually, I was trained in the Mahayana school and practiced Pure Land. When I came to the West, I followed the Thich Nhat Hanh’s tradition and applied it [to]
our temple. Currently, in our temple we combine the practice of Mahayana, Theravada, and Engaged Buddhism. Our main focus is how to live happily and peacefully in mindfulness through the practice.

The findings that cultivate mindfulness and the art of being responsive rather than reactive in all people, especially the young, should be…anyone, because the findings strongly suggest there are essential skillsets that can be learned and improved to obtain greater well-being (joy and happiness) in life. Venerable Dao-Quang shared the art of quiet down the mind so individuals can find their true selves. He said, “From a Buddhist perspective, their true self is their self without worry, anxiety, or stress. It’s full of love, compassion, and understanding. I think that is also needed for leadership skills in any culture.”

The Most Venerable Tinh-Tu, a spiritual advisor for Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Association for many years who is from Watsonville, California shared his thoughts in detail:

We are just like the lotus. Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh told us, "You don't need to do anything. Go back to your true home, your true mind." You are there for yourselves, and you are there for the people around you because people are constantly in a hurry and they forgot their true nature self. People run too fast. If you stop, people say, "Oh, he stopped there. He does not worry too much." That means you are leading by example, to encourage other not to rush and hurry through their life. Just enjoy as it is.

The Most Venerable Minh-Dat mentioned he learned from his Dharma teachers and Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh when he added:

Some sutras are in ancient languages and some are in Sino-Vietnamese. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh has translated some sutras into Vietnamese. A lot of us do not understand Sino-Vietnamese; hence, it is more difficult to understand these sutras. If you understand, however, you can appreciate the meanings at a deeper level. I have also tried to translate these into Vietnamese as well.
He echoed:

Hence, in the last 30 years, I don’t think we have been able to contribute as much to the West in general or American Buddhism in particular. The exception is a few teachers who are well versed in both Western and Eastern culture, such as the Most Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh. He has done so much. Unfortunately people like him are rare. He is a pre-1975 generation. Our only limited success is to maintain some basic Buddhist teachings to Vietnamese congregations, such as taking refuge in the three jewels, the five mindfulness trainings, chanting, and some basic meditation trainings. That’s my opinion.

Venerable, Thien-Duyen, the president of Vietnamese Buddhist Association of Sacramento (VBAS) that was founded in 1978, and the Abbot of Kim Quang Temple, shared some of the tasks he oversees:

Our non-profit organization carries out explicit ideals, traditions, and objectives, focusing on preserving Vietnamese Buddhist culture and traditions, and promoting Buddhist compassion and understanding to help build peace and harmony in families and communities throughout Sacramento county. VBAS has a volunteer-based organization, called Vietnamese Foundation for Youth and Education (VFYE) or Kim Quang Buddhist Youth Association since its establishment. Our main goal is to train and develop young leaders based on the fundamental principles of Buddhism, while retaining our customs, language, and cultural heritage. Furthermore, we train the youths to be productive and responsible citizens who will make contributions to the society in accordance with Buddhism and Vietnamese traditions.

He also mentioned:

VFYE has been serving many programs for Vietnamese youth in the greater Sacramento, California area such as: (a) Conducting Leadership Camps for youth in Northern California to build leadership skills, team-building, self-esteem, boycott skills, and motivational activities; (b) Organizing the Lunar New Year Festival, Autumn Moon Festival, and Vesak (Buddha’s Birthday Celebration and World Peace Prayer) for the community; application of Leadership skills through Summer Camps; Community Services and Beautification Days; (c) Provide Vietnamese Language/Cultural Workshop for Group Leaders and teaching youth Vietnamese language weekly; and (d) Delivering public education programs aiming to help students to develop their personal and leadership skills such as Character Workshop, College workshop, and Enrichment Program.
Most of these participating monks are playing different roles contributing positively to their surroundings, especially the younger ones who are interacting or playing advising roles. The Most Venerable Nguyen-Sieu gave advice on how people should live:

Art of living is to live as bamboo trees. We can see and understand the beauty and flexibility of the bamboo trees—when a gust of wind blows through the bamboo, being flexible, it will be swept with the direction of the wind. This phenomenon illustrates how life moves and bends under different conditions, and we need to live responding accordingly to the elements for things to coexist. We ought to understand ourselves as well as others around us. We must nurture our true selves—the core values within—therefore when we make contact with real-life situations, we are not broken nor feel like we have lost a part of ourselves. Flexibility is a characteristic of the bamboo trees: they never fall apart within the storm. They move within the storm, giving to that which will leave them standing, without breaking. So as laypeople, when we are faced with problems in life, we need to be flexible like the bamboo and build within ourselves the art of living with others in different situations and circumstances.

As pointed out earlier, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks give members of Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Association and others the life-skills necessary to succeed in life. These life-skills include mindfulness, trustworthiness, active listening, self-esteem, compassion, and personal best.

Vietnamese Buddhist monks contribute whole-heartedly to the best of their best abilities. They are the practitioners of precepts—the profound foundation for world peace, justice, and enlightenment. They are the messengers of peace, non-violence, compassion, and understanding. They have influence with laypersons, both Vietnamese and American, laypersons who come and practice at their respective temples, who come and practice at their respective locales. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks also guide, teach, and support many local Buddhist Youth Associations in their areas. They are sharing and spreading these positive messages to the laypersons, mindfulness
practitioners, community leaders, peace lovers and Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Association members. They are also leaders in their chapters and in their residing communities. Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ contributions and influences also spread to the greater community.

f) They are content with who they are, and they are happy with what they are doing in the present time and circumstances. The findings of this research show that the average age of Vietnamese Buddhist monks being ordained was 25.6 years old. The monks practice and share Dharma – the teachings of Buddha – meditation, compassion, and wisdom-based practices. The monks develop and cultivate self-compassion, which leads to their well-being. According to Jazaieri et al. (2013) and Barnard and Curry (2011), self-compassion has been associated with enhanced well-being. Furthermore, Jazaieri et al. (2013) emphasized, “compassion gives rise to altruistic behavior and generosity, essentially, compassion gives rise to a powerful motivation...naturally results in greater social connectedness” (p. 1114). Cutting-edge researchers like Jazaieri et al. (2013) found that “Self-compassion is also associated with reductions in depression, anxiety, self-criticism, fear of failure, thought suppression, rumination, perfectionism, performance goals, and disordered eating behaviors” (p. 1118). Neff (2003, 2009) also confirmed the finding.

Venerable Thich Hanh-Tuan of Chicago, Illinois also shared the sentiment of monks being content and happy with themselves and whatever they are doing:

I feel blessed since not too many people can do what we are doing. Working in this field requires a lot of energy and sacrifice. We are in these positions; as spiritual leaders we should carry out the message of the Buddha to help ourselves as well as others. To be happy, one must be at ease and mindful about our existence.
The Most Venerable Minh-Dat echoed the aforementioned sentiment when he said:

I advise people to do meritorious things during the day, meditate and recite the Buddha’s names at night. Religious practice is not meant to be relaxing or do nothing. For instance, if I want to teach people something, I have to be the example first. It is an ethical practice.

Aspiration is to want to improve oneself. In the Noble Eightfold Path, it is called Right Intention. I wish that all practitioners could develop this important Buddhist concept. For example, if I teach others and advise them to practice vegetarianism or recite the names of the Buddhas, I tell them to be a vegetarian at least twice a month, and if they feel they do not have time to recite Buddhas’ names, I would advise that they could do that any time of the day, even in between TV shows. They can simply close their eyes and recite a few times. Or they can do that before falling into sleep. Doing that, I sow these important seeds into their practice. That’s a moral conduct leading to a necessary goal for both the teacher as well as the students.

The Vietnamese Buddhist monks are sharing Dharma to their congregations and others in their respective communities. They report that they are enjoying what they do.

The Most Venerable Nguyen-Sieu noted their art of living is to live as a river and that everyone should learn from it as well. He shared:

The spirit of Buddhism is formlessness and Tự Duyên (depending condition). The spirit of Buddhism is not a character nor phenomenon, which is subjective and always a rigid status quo. It depends on conditions. So the spirit of the Buddhist precepts (or the spiritual disciplines) is not rigid. They depend on conditions and circumstances; they are not fixed. Therefore, the path of propagating the Dharma transmission to a new land, ethnicity, or a different culture, Buddhism always flows as appropriated and its transmission is dissolved into the new ethnic culture. Therefore, we need to have the art of living as the rivers: water is flowing from upstream to downstream and out to sea. If the river lies on the high plateau, the water flows fast, but when it is down below the plateau, the water flows gently, slowly, more poetic, and then the river merges and integrates into the sea without holding its fixed nature.

In life, too, when we live in an environment or face certain circumstances, we have to apply the art of dissolving (in life with everyone, with other sentient beings, and with the social environment) without holding on to our self-centered egos. The reason there are so many things that we have to suffer or face dissatisfaction with is because of our egos. We refuse to let it go; we want to
clinging to our ego or we are simply not willing to dissolve it with mass people. We tend to give our ego and superego as our beings; when we pay attention to it, it gets bigger. Thus, we think that we are the most important individual and think that others must listen to us. But we tend to forget that in this life, all sentient beings have the Buddha nature. They have the knowledge and the practices, as well as the potential to be awakened. So, we have to respect each other, from an old man to a child, we must always remain in harmony, be courteous, be humble, and compassionate toward each other. If our ego is too big, it will become a big wobble and it might topple our life. It will not put our life at ease or make it peaceful. As laypersons, we need to eliminate or let go of our dogmatic views and ego. Every day we need to reduce our egos; the more we let go, the more harmony we will have with others. In the scripted language, the art of living as a river is to be able to dissolve into the ocean. River water cannot retain its personal nature of the river, it has to merge and integrate into the vast ocean, both of which are referred as water. Water dissolves in water and so do ourselves with everyone.

These mindsets, contentment, and spiritual practices such as meditating and chanting to cultivate merits, kindness, inner peace, vegetarianism, and compassion are rewarding and nourishing, providing wholeheartedness for oneself and others, and are essential for every aspect leadership. Furthermore, one of the practices to cultivate the contentment of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks is finding the beauty within and around the environment and to live a simple life. The simplicity of “being,” contentment, and living frugally also helps with reducing the risks of uncontrolled greed and desires of the material world. As humble monks, each found that beauty delights six senses and each one recognizes the beauty in their own minds and hearts. The monks suggest that if individuals look deeply with compassionate eyes, all things are beautiful and so is each individual. The monks also recalled the teachings of Buddha, which noted that all human beings have the Buddha nature – the ability to be awakened – and so does each individual.
The Vietnamese Buddhist monks urged that once individuals practice mindfulness, recognizes happiness, aspirations, and contentment within and between others, the gained perspective creates a sense of joy and boundless beauty. Breathing – the focal point of mindfulness – is also a means to achieve just that. Thus, beauty is in the breathing and to be able to breath is also beautiful. The monks emphasized breathing as our life support; breathing also helps individuals to recognize the seed of compassion and awakening within. That is their wisdom, based upon the product of experience and practices. The deep knowing and embracing of breathing arises through the art of being in the moment or mindfulness, which is the seed of enlightenment. Thus, individuals need to embrace the Buddha nature that exists within each of us. As spiritual leaders, they recognize their inner core values, qualities, and practices as well as the equal values and qualities of others. Thus, they develop a mutual understanding, mutual respect, and acknowledgement of themselves and others in the path of awakening.

2. Their leadership style is characterized as authentically leading by example, basing decisions upon the core values of mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom.

The participants in this study shared similar perspectives in leadership styles and beliefs, which can be summarized in the following four major areas: (a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America learned from the living example of their masters and lead by example themselves; (b) they practice meditation daily and are mindful of their thinking and actions in every moment; (c) their practices are based upon being compassionate to themselves and others for the benefit of themselves and others in the present and in the future; and (d) they balance their busy schedules with mindfulness and lead the congregation, laypersons, and others. Their ultimate goals are cultivating understanding,
compassion, and liberation. However, for the Vietnamese Buddhist monks, the art is to keep practicing with a sincere intention to help themselves so they can help others. The sub-findings are addressed below.

a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America learned from the living example of their masters and lead by example themselves. The participants in this study mentioned how information was learned from their masters. For the Vietnamese Buddhist monks, the best way to lead is to live the lives themselves, which is to lead by what they are doing. In their hearts and minds, the monks are continuously practicing the Bodhisattva ideals, cultivating merits, and seeking compassion and liberation. The participants agreed that without the heart and mind of a Bodhisattva, the road to achieve happiness or enlightenment would be difficult. The Most Venerable Nguyen-Sieu recalled his learning from his teacher:

Practicing meditation is always concentrate and focuses on the quiet mind. It also focuses on how meditation is in every moment, at any given time, in every activity of the day. No matter how small, one must always focus on being in the “awakened” mode.

Venerable Thich-Tue-Giac highlighted how he learned from his master and made the following statement:

Ven. Master is a bright mirror in which I cannot learn all that has to be learned in this lifetime. Although Ven. [Thich Thanh Tu] was busy with many Dharma responsibilities and duties, his Zen practice was routine and diligent always. Every day he practices three sessions of sitting meditation with a duration of two hours each time. Although, he does not need to meditate that often, to be a role model for us, he did. Even each time when he eats, he always wears the Dharma robe, chants the Heart Sutra, and dedicates merits for others. Similarly, although Buddha was already enlightened, he still practiced meditation, performed alms round, and other things as a means to benefits to others.
The Most Venerable Thang-Hoan, the most senior monk of all the participants, emphasized the Thân Giáo, Khẩu Giáo, Ý Giáo or the Body-Speech-Mind approach, Sangha (collective knowledge), and the message of compassion. For the Most Venerable Thang-Hoan, in order to lead, a leader must be there with the people he or she is leading. The concept of being with the people is the reason why even at his advanced age of 85 Most Venerable Thang-Hoan’s traveling schedule worldwide is still very heavy. Venerable Tu-Luc of Pho Tu Temple in Hayward recalled learning from his master:

I came to the United States all by myself with no family or friends. I met my master and from there I started to have the inspiration of becoming a monastic; accepting him as my father… I learned from him.

Venerable Tu-Luc then mentioned, “What I say means what I’m doing. I’m living that way, so Thân Giáo or leading-by-example.” It appears that Venerable Minh-Thien agreed about learning from his master at the young age. He observed:

The ethical ways here is the practice of the precept. The precept is our ethic. The five basic precepts, you know them right? No killing, no stealing, no adultery, no lying, and no intoxication. Those five precepts are basic guidelines for any Buddhist to live an ethical life. As a Buddhist, we should follow these guidelines very strictly. And as a monk, we have to practice those precepts even more diligently. A layperson has five basic precepts. We [Buddhist monks] have more, more precepts, smaller sub-precepts or 250 precepts overall that we have to follow. That's the ethic we have to abide by.

The Most Venerable Thai-Sieu, who attended one of the famous Buddhist Institutes in Vietnam in the early 1980s before relocating to the United States, also emphasizes the value of leading by example. He stated that even in his 50s, he was still going back to school to achieve his Ph.D. in India. Leading by example is the best way to propagate his message.
Vietnamese Buddhist monks have an unchangeable belief in the Three Jewels: Buddha—the awakened one; Dharma—his teachings; and Sangha—a community of monks who live in harmony and awareness. The Most Venerable Minh-Dat offered some lessons he learned from his Dharma teachers.

I like to see all Buddhists, young and old, to have Right Intention with the three jewels. To have Right Intention, they should practice alongside with other Buddhists and monks in a community called a Sangha. The Three Jewels is as follows. The Buddha has the most priority. Secondly, Buddha-Dharma, which is the teaching of the Buddha, is immense and deep. To understand it, you need the teacher/Sangha. After you take the refuge in the Three Jewels, all Buddhist monks and nuns are your teachers, and, not necessarily the original one that you studied with. You are then considered born into the house of the Three Jewels. Teachers simply provide guidance. Hence, depending on your situation and condition, you learn from whomever you feel can guide you on the right path. You may learn a lot from some teacher and not as much from some other teachers. If a teacher is wrong, you may avoid them. I meant that you could avoid their wrongness, not the teachers themselves. In fact, if you look deeply, they both can be your teachers. One will be an example of what is the right way of practice, while the other will be an example of what you should avoid. That way your faith in the Three Jewels will not be corroded. You should avoid gossips and a judgmental attitude. This would lead to negative energy, which contradicts to what a Buddhist should practice. I just want to add another advice is that all Buddhists should have a deep faith with the Three Jewels, consider them as your mirror, a guiding star for your journey. You will benefit greatly from it.

What the Vietnamese Buddhist monks learned from their masters are the core practices of Buddhism—the profound perspectives of interbeing (dependent-arising), of emptiness, and cultivating merits and compassion by doing good deeds and practicing the precepts. They also recognized that nothing will really exist or develop from a single element or condition. These early teachings they obtained from their master, which they have continued to practice, have a significant impact on them being spiritual leaders. Their leadership styles are clearly demonstrated by their own learning and teachings. The
findings from the artifacts and questionnaires also support the viewpoints of the participants in the focus-group sessions and personal interviews.

b) They practice meditation daily and are mindful of their thinking and actions in every moment. In their leadership roles, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks acknowledge that without making efforts, the achievement of anything is almost impossible. Thus, they learn and practice diligently. The methods of practices and perceptions of the participants are diverse, yet they share the same thing: the practice of Buddhism and its methods to ease suffering (Dukkha). The participants whole-heartedly agreed that without practice, it is difficult to achieve peace of mind. For instance, as Venerable Tue-Giac, a senior student of renowned Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Thanh Tu, observed during the interview:

Learning is one little step but doing is another big step because learning is just an understanding of the theory on the surface. Only through practice we can shine light onto what we learned. And from the true understanding that we obtain from practice, others will receive the Dharma much more deeply. If we only learn through words and text, just theory, then what we teach does not have depth but rather merely spoken words with no true meaning. Words do not carry true inner energy obtained from practice and will make it difficult for others to be receptive and accept.

Venerable Dao-Quang, a licensed psychologist, further stated, "If you practice well enough you can see tremendous change in your life which benefits those around you. Change begins inside yourself." So, what exactly is the practice? For the Most Venerable Minh-Dat:

First you have to see your practice through the scope of Buddha’s teachings. You have to see its benefits. It would be wrong if your practice does not bring benefits to yourself and you still teach it to others. The same can be said about your belief in the Noble Eightfold Path. To be an effective teacher and to do it correctly, first you have to see that you have benefitted from it. Others will learn from you. In Abitabha Sutra, the Buddha said he had seen the benefits of practice in the
Western realm; hence, he teaches it to others and advised everyone to aim toward that. The sutra says a lot. I have applied them and seen the benefits for myself. Therefore, I want to educate others. The Buddha said there are many ways to achieve Dharma. There is no singular truth. Therefore, one should not proclaim an absolute truth.

In my experience, you have to see the benefits for yourself, in order to be able to carry out the Dharma and live ethically. Otherwise monastic life can be sad. I have heard of a certain monk who came to the United States and returned to his native country because he has found the temple life here in the States is quite dull. What a waste. The conviction may have not been strong. If your faith is not deep, you yourself may not be able to do things. At that age, for sure one should have enough conviction.

Venerable Minh-Thien agreed with Most Venerable Minh-Dat, by stating:

I practice the four foundations of mindfulness in the Vipassana meditation. They are: mindfulness of the body; mindfulness of feelings (or sensations); mindfulness of mind (or consciousness); and mindfulness of mental phenomena (or mental objects).

In contemporary times, this practice is most associated with Theravada Buddhism as well as less secular. Venerable Hanh-Tuan, another participant, echoed his practice experience that being mindful of every moment is a gift for oneself and others.

Venerable Thich-Minh-Thien also stated, “When we practice, we should have the happiness and the enjoyment of everything right there.” He added:

Mindfulness means you observe your thoughts. For example during the course of the day, you have a lot of thoughts popping up and down. And because of that, when you observe your thoughts, you are more aware. You don't let your feeling [get] involved, because when your feelings get involved, your thoughts contaminate it. It's no longer pure, so mindfulness means observing and seeing what's going on with your mind. It is not like you have to be intensely attentive to your thoughts, but being mindful means you just know what you are doing; when I am talking to you, I know I am talking to you. I'm being mindful when I am engaged with you completely. When I am washing dishes, I know I am washing dishes, or anything in a regular routine daily works; you're just mindful about what you are doing. And during that time, it helps you maintain a calm and peaceful mind. Because you are observing what's going on, there are many unwholesome thoughts popping up; like being upset at somebody or something,
or you're not happy with something and when you being mindful, you are able to see that.

Venerable Minh-Thien further advocated the concept of mindfulness. He said:

You can change the course. Instead of allowing your thought to take you whenever it wants, you can change the course of your thoughts into something else or you can observe it and see where it takes you. If you can observe it, then you are less attached to it and can keep a distance from it. So mindfulness helps you to recognize your thought, be aware of its existence, and not to follow it hypnotically. That's the first step for any beginner. When you start meditating, that's the way to go because it's so simple. You just watch what's going on in your mind and that's how you sit.

Venerable Dao-Quang added:

Well, when I say, mindfulness, it's just one part of the practice. We can also incorporate other different techniques, besides mindfulness. For example, I think it's very important to incorporate cognitive behavior therapy into this model so that we can improve our understanding and help ourselves and others know how to get in contact with reality, rather than based on what we know; based on our feelings, our emotions, where sometimes, we have a wrong interpretation about reality. My objective is to let people have a chance to discover what they really want to do in their life.

Based on my experience, most people get lost. Sometimes, they really don't know why they have to buy this house. Sometimes they don't know why they have to buy this car. Sometimes they don't know why they have to get married. Is this all just social pressure? Maybe. "Follow the majority." I see some of the people really don't know why they react the way they do and often confuse themselves. People spend a great deal of time and energy to deal with their detached actions. That's all their life is about. I think the technique of mindfulness allows for people to slow down, be more aware of themselves, and be more harmonious with their surroundings, which result in a more productive and happy life.

Venerable Tue-Giac, perhaps, summarized in this way:

In general, every way of practice in Buddhism is based on the teaching and style of the teacher, thus it varies. But the goals all point back to how to return back to our serene true mind and live a happy life right in the present life. So the theory is all the same, but the way of practice is different. As for the practice of mindfulness, it means for us to be attentive to the present moment where the body is, the mind is also present. Be present in whatever you are doing and not to think about other things. Only one thought right here and now. Just like the poem: “Live still and awake, when a thought arise be aware and let it go. Facing the
outside world with an unattached mind, no worries and sorrow.” Zen just means a life that is alive and fresh. That which is alive and fresh can only be expressed here and now because the past is already gone, living with the past is living with something that is dead. As for the future, it is not here yet but we still long for it. We tend to wish and dream to become this or that not knowing we are living with just illusions. This is not reality. Therefore, we must somehow learn to live right here in the present of what we have in front of us. We are breathing in this air and we are aware and awake right in this moment; this is mindfulness, which is Zen.

As stated by the participants, mindfulness helps bring awareness and attention, which can be a primordial intelligence. It is the art of meditation that brings many fruitful results. Overall, the participants in the personal interviews and the focus-group session shared their practice of mindfulness and meditation and noted that offerings come from the depths of their own practices. For example, the Most Venerable Tinh-Tu noted that in his responses to the researcher’s questions “are the wisdom accumulated from 58 years of practice.” This spiritual awakening—the awakening from their dreamy thoughts or delusion—is practice-based, which make the Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership style engaging and authentic.

c) Their practices are based upon being compassionate to themselves and other beings for the benefit of themselves and others in the present and in the future. Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ technique of self-realization is the selflessness. It is one of the antidotes for suffering. Since they are trained in cultivating wisdom and morality as well as concentrated meditation, they find the joy in working for the benefit of everyone and other sentient beings. The findings from the focus group, personal interviews, and semi-structured questionnaire indicated that participants all agreed about this. “The fundamental practices of Buddhism or the purpose of the Dharma is to help people transform from misery to joy, from ignorance to insightfulness and ultimately
reach enlightenment or Nirvana.” For example, Dharma helps people realize that life, as everything else, is impermanent as it is constantly changing. Then, the individuals will be aware that *the self* does not exist or is not willing to let go of their egos. Talking about ego, Venerable Thien-Duyen explained:

> Every human being can build up an ego. It is not visible, but it's huge like the universe, so in Buddhist practice, the goal is to diminish the ego. So, I usually practice my way, everything coming to me that is a negative thing, I reduce it, make it smaller and smaller until it's nothing. Make it disappear like the dust in the air, so that I can be happy. If I don't practice this way, every day, you know, every day a ton of emotions pop up in my mind. When you pick up the phone, and someone people respond very negatively to you or when we do something wrong, we are not happy, so a ton of troubling things, so I practice, and I listen and I look, I reset, or recycle it, then I feel better. That's the way I choose to practice every day.

He also prompted:

> In Buddhism, there are 84,000 ways to practice, but for me it's more than that. I practice all the time, even when I sleep, or I wake up at midnight, I think and something good pops up, I take a note and practice. So I am awake every moment, so walking, sitting, eating, drinking, holding the rock, or watering the trees, anytime we can practice.

Therefore, practicing Dharma—being compassionate and wise or loving and understanding—leads to the path of enlightenment. A path completed with happiness and endless peace or the state of beings. Thus, the Most Venerable Minh-Dat reminds everyone:

> The Abbot’s obligation depends on the Sangha/Community of practitioners. In general, an Abbot is first and foremost a spiritual leader. He/she transmits the Dharma to others depending on their ability to understand. To be an effective teacher, the Abbot has to have a solid practice first. The teaching can’t be based on theories alone.

In other words, the monks and laypersons need to apply Dharma, which helps to build love, understanding and tolerance for one another. Furthermore, the teaching of
Buddha, Dharma, aims at eliminating the three poisons—Greed, Hatred, and Ignorance—which is the root of all suffering and delusions. Buddha once said, “I am already the Buddha and all of the beings are the Buddha-to-be since we all have the spirit of absolute equality, the Buddha nature.” Thus, the intention of Buddhism is to bring mindful practices into everyday life, hoping to convey compassion and wisdom to all sentient beings to be soon awakened. Venerable Tue-Giac of Dai Dang Monastery shared:

Ever since I chose the path of monastic life, I already have the mentality to help bring benefits to others, which means how to bring to others a life of happiness, peace, and joy. And the true joy and happiness in Buddhism is to return and live with the Buddha nature; the enlightened mind that is already originally present with us and not something else that we need to look for in the external world. When we are able to live with this internal happiness, then all the seductions of the outside world is no more attractive to us. And from here we are able to bring this energy of happiness to others.

He added that:

They must somehow recognize that the reality of this life is suffering and have to clearly grasp the concept of affinity, cause and effect, and impermanence in order to have enough faith and trust. Only then they can practice and realize the happiness and peace from within themselves and not anything on the outside world or far away. People, especially the Americans, are very practical. Only when they are able to practice and experience the benefits and joy in the present then they will believe and not promise them any mystical realm far away. Or else, if you practice today, you will be free tomorrow then it will not be accepted. And so the method of practice is to let them practice and experience the joy right at the time of practice. And the practice of mindfulness helps everyone to live harmoniously in this life, thus give them faith to continue to practice with this new spiritual journey of their own.

The Venerable Dao-Quang, who participated in one of the personal interviews online, also shared his lived experience about the practicality of practicing the way of love and understanding to have a better life. He made the following statement:
There are many values and Buddhist theories that I incorporate into my leadership skills – values such as “walking the walk,” practicing love and kindness, self-awareness, self-determination, and harmony; and classic Buddhist theories such as the interrelatedness of the individual and the community, the interdependence of all things, and inter-being. I also practice living a simple life and respect everyone’s contribution to the community and to each other. I do not allow myself to abuse my spiritual power and try my best to be aware of conflicts of interest.

The Most Venerable Minh-Dat, another well-regarded participant in the interviews, described how mindful and spiritual leadership helped ordinary people become more mindful, compassionate, productive, and appreciative. He added:

My leadership is based on four things. First, speech or action has to be right, meaning they follow the standard of Dharma, Vinayapitaka (code of ethics), and Vinaya. Second is the right action. Third, it has to apply to a right place. Fourth, it is in the right time. In other words, it is the right thing, the right execution, the right place, and in the right context. Following all that, one can achieve success. There are times when you have a right standard. But if actions are not carried out correctly, it will not lead to success. Execution can be your speech, i.e., if you are not articulate or convincing enough. Then there are factors that do not apply to the right time or right place. For example, before building the temple, I had consulted many monks from all ranks. I wanted to see if there were any opposing ideas. Then, I wanted to see how it could be carried out the right way, at the right place and at the right time.

Actually, these principles come from the sutras. One has to learn for oneself first and then develop one’s own principles. If you find these principles to be helpful, it has to be taught to the next generation. There are many things that I have learned from my own teacher and two other special teachers in my life. My teacher did not talk much and did not discipline much. However, before he passed away, he said: “Later on in life, wherever you practice, choose a place where Dharma can flourish without material possessions.” I believe what he meant, was to choose a place where there is real practice. We want to be mindful of places where material wealth and physical comfort can be a hindrance to real practice. The other influential teachers that I have are the Most Venerable Quang Duc and the Most Venerable Mau Ve. I have learned so much from them.

As has been illustrated earlier, their wholesome ways of action bring about change and happiness for themselves and people around them. These trainings shape the mind and brain to be aware and increase what is positive and decrease what is negative.
It is a form of cultivating merits. These positive actions (Karma) often lead to the satisfaction of self and others. More practically, in all the interview sessions, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks were displaying smiles, calmness, and awareness of their surroundings. They are mindful in their speech as well as action, even if it is just drinking tea. When the monks have a solid foundation, their leaderships and practices make significant impacts on others. This spiritual dimension in leadership is needed for all stakeholders in many settings. Thus, this kind of leadership style is essential to embrace, develop, and transform for the greater good of all beings both at the present time and in the future.

d) They balance their hectic schedule with mindfulness and lead the congregation, laypersons, and others. Vietnamese Buddhist monks, like all other Buddhist practitioners, would elevate everyone by sharing and teaching the practices that help, inspire, motivate, and achieve the individual experience of happiness, balance, and harmony. Even though the participants are very busy with their scheduling from offering advice to conduct prayer services, they are motivated and balance their busy schedule accordingly. Their typical events are: Sunday services, New Year services, Vesak Buddha Day (Lễ Phật Đản), Ullambana Day (Lễ Vu Lan), Parents' Day, praying for the deceased, memorial services, annual anniversaries, annual banquets, and yearly and annual retreats for its members. Other events include meeting the spiritual needs of Buddhists in the area, and most of the temples have the following functions: setting up Altars at home for Buddhists, Buddhist Wedding Ceremony, visiting local families with difficulties, visiting and consoling patients in hospitals, visiting and consoling families with deceased relatives and the Funeral Ceremony. Additionally, Vietnamese Buddhist
monks have daily practice. According to Venerable Tu-Luc, “We usually have a
daily schedule. You see, it is a tradition that we chant in the morning and in the evening;
we usually have chanting and meditating practices such as sitting and walking
meditation.” Specifically, Venerable Hanh-Tuan described his schedule at his center:

I have my own schedule and for the layperson as well. For the layperson, since
they are too busy, I set the schedule of chanting every Wednesday night and
Friday night, one hour for chanting and meditation, from 8:00-9:00 p.m. Also,
every three months, I set up a retreat for them. This retreat runs from one to three
days and there is a lot of meditation during the retreat.

Venerable Tue-Giac of Dai Dang Meditation center has a fixed and structured
scheduling. The typical schedule from the artifact that was collected is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Schedule for Monks:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Morning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03:30 - 03:45AM: Wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04:00 - 06:00AM: Sitting meditation session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06:15 - 06:35AM: Walking meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06:40 - 07:10AM: Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07:20 - 08:00AM: Free time (study, read, and meditate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08:00 - 09:00AM: Chores (such as cutting grass and cleaning bathroom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09:00 - 09:30AM: Break time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09:30 - 10:30AM: Finish chores and help around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30 - 11:30AM: Free time (study, read, and meditate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:40 - 12:10PM: Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Afternoon</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 - 1:00PM: Walking meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:00 - 2:00PM: Afternoon rest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:00 - 2:20PM: Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:30 - 4:00PM: Dharma Talk given by the Abbot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evening</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04:00 - 4:45PM: Dinner (optional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05:00 - 5:45PM: Repentance Ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06:00 - 6:50PM: Free time (study, read, and meditate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07:00 - 9:00PM: Meditation session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09:15 - 10:00PM: Free time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 - 03:30PM: Sleep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In contrast to the structured schedule that Venerable Tue-Giac shared about Dai Dang Zen Monastery, the Most Venerable Minh-Dat of Quang Nghiem Temple in Stockton, California noted:

> In the United States, my schedule is flexible. I meditate whenever or wherever there is a need. My main concern is for the Sangha. In the temple, there are young monks and nuns. They go to school and have their own homework. Hence, we accommodate that. Usually there are two main events. In the morning, from 5:00 to 6:00 a.m., the monks and nuns meditate; recite Buddha’s names, chant sutras, or simply practice paying attention to their breath. From 6:00 to 7:00 a.m., we chant main sutras. Morning practice usually lasts about one and a half hours total.

As shown above, the busy schedule and service for the layperson and community takes most of their time, Vietnamese Buddhist monks still balance their time to practice Buddhism. They take one task at a time and find the joy in doing so. For them, the notion of *here and now* is the way to have a balanced life. Data from the survey questionnaire, artifacts, and notes correspond with the lived-experience and practices of the Buddhist monks in the focus-group session and personal interviews. Their desires to help the laypersons and others have a well and balanced life mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically are reflected in their busy schedule. Such findings are noteworthy since they reveal the nuances and characters of Vietnamese Buddhist monks.

3. **Through their practices, their presence, and their contributions to the welfare of others, they bring about peace of mind and happiness for themselves and for others in society.**

It is the doctrine of Buddhism to ease suffering and create individual and planetary wholeness, harmony, and peace. The practices, being present and contributing, were evident and can be summarized in these four points: (a) The foundation for peace in the Vietnamese Buddhist monks and others is the mindset of the Bodhisattva (making a
difference for all beings) and is the practice of precepts, which transform negative
into positive thoughts and actions; (b) Their practice of calming the mind, opening the
heart and soul, and seeing others as their colleagues, collaborators, and teachers brings
peace-of-mind, optimism, and loving-kindness to themselves and others; (c) Their own
happiness, which is fundamental to their leadership and spiritual roles, depends upon
their daily activities and mindfulness practice; and (d) They are humble regarding their
contributions and lead with their sincere, kind-hearted intentions.

The participants believe their practices bring peace to themselves and others. To
the Vietnamese Buddhist monks, the meaning of peace can be achieved only through the
transformation of the individual’s mind, from impurity to purity. This is exactly what the
Buddha says in the Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti: “The purity of the world reflects the
purity of one’s mind.”

The Most Venerable Minh-Dat, a spiritual advisor for many Buddhist
organizations in Northern California, echoed this statement, "I believe that the energetic
waves of wisdom and compassion…might be inspired to transform hatred into love and
suffering into true happiness."

By the same token, the Most Venerable Thang-Hoan offered some suggestions on
how to basically transform ourselves:

Peace is a part of the Buddhist's daily prayers. The meaning of peace, according
to Buddhism, can be achieved by transforming the defiled mind into a pure one,
or from the disturbed to the peaceful. In particular, peace can be achieved
through the following ways:

1) Practicing peace for oneself: lessening desire by practicing moral precepts,
controlling hatred by being mindful, and liberating ignorance by understanding.
2) Practicing peace for people: do not take what is not given, do not do things that
are harmful to others and living things, and do not hold prejudices against them.
3) Practicing peace for the environment: thinking of the hunger and famine of other people by practicing a life of self-sufficiency, to love and protect the environment by not wasting and destroying natural resources.

The participants urge people to cultivate the meaning of wisdom and compassion and actualize it into their daily lives so as to make this world a peaceful place to live. They believe personal transformation and self-consciousness, as well as the consciousness of others would lead to a higher purpose and or a greater good.

a) The foundation for peace in the Vietnamese Buddhist monks and others is the mindset of the Bodhisattva (making a difference for all beings) and is the practice of precepts, which transform negative into positive thoughts and actions.

Participants in the focus group, as well as in the personal interviews, observed that abiding by the precepts and the monastic codes are the foundation for transformation. As the Most Venerable Nguyen-Sieu pointed out: “The mindset of Bodhisattva is always in the spiritual leadership roles based on the foundation of compassion with a clear faith, the truth, and the fact arising from the self-assessment and experience.” He added that the teachings of Buddha and the spirit of his teachings are always clear and compassionate. They are based on rational judgments and practical applications in everyday life of lived-experienced individuals, including the Buddha. Thus, the spiritual application – the foundation to shape the lives and beliefs of Vietnamese Buddhist monks – is compassion. Thus, taking precepts, including the monastic codes, to cultivate the compassion and transformations for oneself and others is the Bodhisattva’s mindset.

Venerable Hanh-Tuan mentioned that even though he cannot say what the monastic codes are to a layperson, it can be researched. The five basic precepts, which are the basis of Buddhist morality, for a layperson are: avoid killing or harming living
beings; avoid stealing; avoid sexual misconduct; avoid lying, and avoid alcohol and other intoxicating drugs. Moreover, any layperson can also take 10 precepts, which are:

(a) Do not kill, (b) Do not steal, (c) Do not indulge in sexual misconduct, (d) No lying,
(e) No double-tongued speech, (f) No abusive speech, (g) No irresponsible speech, (h) Do not be greedy, (i) No hatred, and (j) No delusion. However, any Buddhist monk must abide by the 250 precepts, which can be found in the monastic codes.

The participants agreed that precepts are the foundation for harmony, peace, and prosperous society. Their mindset is that all transformation starts within and while we cannot change others, we can certainly change ourselves. Thus, Vietnamese Buddhist monks dedicate their whole lives to the practices of Buddhism. Venerable Dao-Quang pointed out, “Living in harmony, practicing shared community responsibility, respecting all people and their opinions, and focusing on what we can do or what we can improve now for the betterment of all.”

Venerable Tue-Giac, a thoughtful Zen practitioner, urged:

The principle of ethics and morals is that we have to live by the precepts. In the sutra Buddha taught: “When the Precepts are still present, then the Dharma is still present.” A leader has to live as a role model and a good example for everyone, and has to fully follow the precepts set by Buddha. It doesn’t matter what time and age it is, the precepts are never out of date. First, we have to be good ourselves, before doing good to others. There is an old saying, “To put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order. To put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order. To put the family in order, we must first cultivate our personal life. We must first set our hearts right.” If we ourselves cannot live righteously, then are we able to lead and teach others differently?

Venerable Minh-Thien also agreed when he observed: “The ethical ways lie at the precepts. The precept is our ethical.”

The five basic precepts, you know that right? No killing, no stealing, no adultery, no lying, and no intoxication. So those five precepts are basic guidelines for any
Buddhist to live an ethical life. So, one should follow that guideline very carefully. And as a monk, we have even more than that. We have the basic five precepts. We have more, more precepts, smaller, sub-precepts we have to follow, but that's the ethical we have to abide by.

He also added:

You know the belief system here is to believe in yourself. That's Buddhism. The Buddha always talks about that. You are, you have your own Buddha nature. So you are your own God. Everything is in your hand. You believe in yourself; you already have everything here. The only thing you need to learn is how to recognize it and to maximize the potential in you. The first step is to recognize the hindrances or obstacles that stop you from being liberated, being free. So that's why you have to practice meditation to see that. To see what kind of defilement, unwholesome things you get rolled up in; that you are unable to be free.

We lead by example and we believe that all human has a Buddha nature. So I try to empower people with that, because they have the same thing that I do. And as a leader, I have to teach them what kind of potential they already have within them and gradually make them recognize they had that potential inside of them all along.

The notion of being proactive and controlling your own destiny is very crucial for being a leader. The future is echoed by the thoughts, actions, and behaviors today. The Most Venerable Minh-Dat, a diligent meditation practitioner and a community leader in Northern California declared:

I often remind my students that there are three types of Buddhist followers. There is not a fourth type. The first type implies those who don’t talk much, just practice. Or if they do talk, they only speak of the ongoing practice. The second type, talks often about their practice. Being different from the first type, they focus mainly on Buddhist Dharma/theory. Then there is the third type. They both talk about Dharma and practice seriously. One has to taste and know the Dharma by first hand before having enough wisdom to teach others.

For example, if you advise people to be a vegetarian, you need to be a vegetarian first to see its benefits for yourself. Subsequently, you learn the reasons behind vegetarianism, in what historical context did the movement develop, and where or what country did the movement come from. During the Shakyaamuni’s time, he was not a strict vegetarian. He practiced alms rounds (Offering food is one of the oldest and most common rituals of Buddhism. Food is given to monks during alms rounds. It is a meritorious act that also reminds us not to be greedy or selfish). There was no kitchen. The precepts allowed monks
and nuns to accept any kinds of cooked foods. However, the practice later evolved into accepting vegetarian foods only. The reasons behind this belong to [a] different discussion.

The concepts of applying the fundamental principles are vital in leading and teaching. Vietnamese Buddhist monks inspire others to act and moderate accordingly. He passionately continued:

All previous Buddhas have taught us to focus in practice to achieve faith. It is not the issue if you are a vegetarian or non-vegetarian. Being a vegetarian is not the only way to achieve Nirvana. It is a way to help us develop compassion and respect for all living beings. Vegetarianism later had spread to both Vietnam and China (from India). In the old days, it was advocated that we should at least practice vegetarianism [for] four days a month, based on [the] lunar calendar. It was an idea proposed by my Indian missionary in China. During ancient times, Chinese people believed that there were sacred beings visiting their homes during the full moon, as well as on the first day of [the] lunar month. They killed and sacrificed pigs, chickens, ducks, and other animals to offer the spirits, in hopes of having a protected life. When Buddhism developed strongly in China, the masters had an idea that Buddhists should refrain from killing and eating meats during these days. If there were a million people who followed the advice, there would be countless animal lives preserved. That’s a practice coming out of compassion and generation for life. In the United States, it is not necessarily that you follow [the] lunar calendar, but rather [to] just pick four days a month. You can pick certain weekends in a month, or just choose Saturday. You can do it every day. Life needs to be respected everyday.

As the Most Venerable Tinh-Tu reminded the researcher: “When you complete your doctoral degree, it is just a small Ph.D., the big and real Ph.D. is the practice to have happiness in you and your family.” The Most Venerable Minh-Dat echoed this statement when the researcher asked him the last question of the interview. Here is the dialogue:

Researcher: May I ask you one last question in English.
Master Thich-Minh-Dat: I don’t speak English that well. I will answer in Vietnamese and you can translate.
Researcher: No, Master. Please answer in English. This is a simple question: “Is there anything you would like to share, anything that you would like to add in this research?”
Master Thich-Minh-Dat: I want this dissertation to be good; you are the first one. You show something to somebody, you have to get benefit from the things you
share with everybody. It is very important to me. Don’t just share what you talk or what you write. *Keep in mind, what you write is what you do, what you talk is what you are doing.* That’s it.

As the findings showed, the practice or the notion of daily practices is the foundation. Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership style is by doing and inspiring others to perform their best and to flourish and reach their highest potential. As noted, everyone has his or her own unique way of practice to identify the negatives or the unwholesome and mistakes in life and transform them into positives and a peaceful state of beings. Yet the fundamental foundation is the same. Precepts (Sila) or discipline as well as morality are central to Buddhist practices. It is the means to cultivate peace and happiness. Moreover, precept, discipline, and morality enable people to live together harmoniously; they are the keystones for further awareness, concentration, and wisdom. However, the foundation, as indicated by the participants exclusively, is the practice itself. This mindset and skillset are essential for any leaders—especially spirited leaders and spiritual leaders—to have universal compassion and great wisdom to impact others.

b) Their practice of calming the mind, opening the heart and soul, and seeing others as their colleagues, collaborators, and teachers brings peace-of-mind, optimism, and loving-kindness to themselves and others. Vietnamese Buddhist monks recognize and understand what they need to do as Trường Từ Như Lai or the sons of the Buddha. They continue to learn and practice and shares these core values, practices, and insights with others. As Venerable Tue-Giac put it:

The most important thing is how to help others recognize the true value of Buddhism and how beneficial and practical it is. If everyone put effort into studying and practicing the Dharma in their life, then they will be happy and peaceful right here in this lifetime and not any promised land in the future. Enlightenment is not in the future nor anywhere up ahead. Waiting for
enlightenment anywhere ahead or future is waiting in vain. That is not practical. You have to apply and practice to get the benefit right here in the moment that you are practicing.

These practices are based on the foundation of recognizing and understanding that joy, happiness, and peace can be achieved “in the here and now” and that one does not have to wait to achieve joy, happiness, and peace in the future. The fruitful practice is possible in the here and now. During the interviews, the respondents were often relaxed, at peace, and reflective when answering the questions. They smiled a lot and took the time to drink tea while having the conversation. Most Venerable Thai-Sieu observed:

Today, we must understand that interbeing or interdependence is the key for mutual understanding and mutual respect. That real love will not exist without understanding and true understanding will not exist without love.

Dao-Quang added:

I believe that everything changes constantly, moment by moment; therefore, my leadership style is flexible and adaptable to the current situation. I believe that life is interdependent. So as leader, I have to see that I am not separate from my followers. We work together, and we share life values and responsibilities together.

The Most Venerable Minh-Dat, took his time to drink tea, exhale slowly, and made the following statement:

One’s Right View is one’s ability to see truth for what it is. Right View first has to exist to provide a frame for what to follow. If you see it correctly, then your thoughts, actions, and practice will follow correctly. It is not necessarily that you have to see with your eyes. Your mind needs Right View too. Does that truly originate from your compassion? In the sutra, the Buddha talked about both compassion and wisdom. Compassion itself is wisdom. Wisdom arises from compassion. A lot of Buddhist teachings are based on compassion and wisdom. They are interrelated. Based on it, you wouldn’t go wrong. The Noble Eightfold Path is that. Once Right View exists, all Right Intention (Thought), Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration will all follow. If the first key and lock do not match, then it would be difficult to open the door for other things to follow. They are all important.
However, a Right View, which is based on compassion and wisdom, will never be an out of date concept.

To clarify his thinking and practice, the researcher asked him this question: “For a Buddhist leader, what ground/standard can be used to decide what is right or wrong?” He continued his conversation this way:

The Buddha did mention about standard in the sutra. In one sutra, Right View is considered a mirror for self-reflection. Therefore, before determining right or wrong, a person needs to know what he/she says or practices is appropriate with the Buddhist teachings. Is there a similar situation in the Dharma/Sutra? Does the Vinayapitaka (Buddhist code of ethics/conducts) apply in this situation? Then one needs to see how does that fit with the Vinaya (Vinaya in Sanskrit literally means “leading out,” “education,” or “discipline.” It is the regulatory framework for the Buddhist monastic community based on the canonical texts called Vinaya Pitaka). Reasoning based on theory, science, or scientific standard may be ok or even may sound good. However, it may pull you into a trap of using understanding of non-Buddhist knowledge to explain Buddha’s teaching. It could even be harmful to oneself and others if one does not use Dharma/Sutra, code of ethics, and Vinaya as a self-reflecting mirror. That’s the original source that a leader needs to know and apply.

Venerable Hanh-Tuan specified:

For me, whenever I work or do something that affects members of the temple, I always think of myself as their friend and not as their leader because in Mahayana Buddhist tradition, we consider other human beings as our friends. That is the teaching of Mahayana Buddhism. We believe that all human beings possess Phật tánh or the Buddha nature, and I consider them as my brothers or sisters. Sometimes, I even look at them as my teachers, or Bodhisattva, we don’t know. I am not yet enlightened, so I don’t exactly know who they are. Whenever they are suffering and have a problem, they come and express them to me, then I know, but regularly I don’t have the super-nature power to know them all. So the best way is to consider them as your friends, masters, and even Bodhisattva (the spirit of giving, compassion, and peace towards all). We need to be humble enough and learn from them.

The ideals of being collaborative, sharing responsibility, and seeing each other equally is the foundation for justice, not only socially but also spiritually. This collective
awakening in our society is the calling of Vietnamese Buddhist monks. Venerable Thien-Duyen of Kim Quang Buddhist Temple in Sacramento, California elaborated:

I believe from the bottom of my heart that all people have a beautiful Buddha nature and they too can become a Buddha. Buddha is when people have compassion, when people have the wisdom, and the mind is the value of the highest compassion and wisdom. So when they have enough of that (compassion and wisdom), they are always open to service. I trust people, I respect all people, and the value of people's minds. And I practice that way, so it is effective for me. If we practice, we have enough energy, and if we have enough energy, we are not afraid for all the people...so I am happy to practice on my own, I am happy to share or advise ways to connect with the people to balance between right and wrong.

He added:

So when I am balanced, I don't feel upset, I don't get mad at people, and I am filled with energy. I use this method because everything on earth is made beautiful. So the tree is beautiful, the rock is beautiful. How come the rock and the tree are beautiful? The rock and the tree, we called them non-living things... but the rock and the tree to me, they are still living things. When we focus on practice, we see the rock is a living thing, and the tree is a living thing. And if the rock is a non-living thing why are people a living thing? Human beings, why are we hurting, why are we hating, why are we rejecting, and why are we not believing ... So that's why, that's my insight, that's my lesson. Everything comes from the mind.

As the findings show, this is being optimistic and authentic. Most of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks are not born leaders; they struggle to learn and believe in their own beings so as to make differences. The monks understand their weaknesses and shortcomings, yet they also understand their purpose and practice solid core Buddhist values that come from their hearts and minds. As Venerable Tu-Luc stated:

Mindfulness is the means and is also the end. You know: “There is no way to enlightenment; enlightenment is the way.” So to me, within mindfulness, you have everything right here. With the Buddha teaching, it becomes cause and effect to each other. To me, it also a means and a solution. Let me share with you one interesting article that I read. Google scientists called themselves the “mindfulness engineers.”
The findings show that practice is the key. As Venerable Tue-Giac recalled the message of his teacher, Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Thanh Tu, he noted:

Keep in mind that the Most Venerable [Thich Thanh Tu of Thuong Chieu Monastery in Vietnam] says: “When practicing but not studying, then you are practicing blindly; and when you are studying but not practicing, then you are just a bag to hold books. Understanding the right way clearly then our practice will not go off track. And we have to practice all the way on the right path in order to help bring benefits to others.

The art of practicing: calming the mind, opening the heart and soul, and seeing others as their colleagues, collaborators, and teachers reveals the generous and peaceful work culture as well as the productive outcomes that bring comfort, positive, and loving-kindness to all. Thus life would be much more beautiful and peaceful. Overall, the concept and core values in educational foundations of Buddhism are the dynamic, openness and flexibility in its methods and practices that aim at finding the beauty, peace of mind, and compassion and loving-kindness in all.

c) Their own happiness, which is fundamental to their leadership and spiritual roles, depends upon their daily activities and mindfulness practice.

Participants identified various occasions when they were content and enjoyed what they were doing. They mentioned that people should not give something they do not have. Thus, they work very diligently to cultivate compassion, happiness, and merits in order to share with others. Vietnamese Buddhist monks also encourage laypersons and others to come practice mindfulness and cultivate merits whenever and wherever possible. They maintain that while it will be difficult, it is possible to have Nirvana, a state of being or a happy life in this earthly world in the here and now and that individuals do not have to wait until death or after life. As a result, the monks lead by example and always practice
in order to be happy and peaceful. Venerable Phap-Chon of San Jose mentioned that individuals must find the joy and enjoy what they are doing. He said: “If I am not peaceful and happy, when I am close to other people, they are not happy and peaceful either.” Furthermore, he argued, “As a monk in America, you are not only a spiritual leader, but you are also a sociologist, a social worker, a psychiatrist, a counselor.” He urged, “Therefore, you have to put your efforts into doing that. Serve for the community.” His message is being happy with what you have and what you do not have and live a simple life and not in the “materialistic world.” More importantly, Venerable Dao-Quang, a licensed therapist who is using mindfulness practices as part of the healing process, observed:

Practicing mindfulness helps me to see things as they are so that I can be an objective leader without prejudice or personal bias. When making a decision I do not allow myself to rely on my own interest or subjective feeling but instead make a decision based on objective reality and the need of our organization at the moment.

For Venerable Phap-Chon, one of the practices is reciting the Gathas, which are short poems or verses that help the monks to practice being mindful in everyday activities. According to Thich Nhat Hanh’s tradition:

A Gatha can open and deepen our experience of simple acts that we often take for granted. When we focus our mind on a Gatha, we return to ourselves and become more aware of each action. When the Gatha ends, we continue our activity with heightened awareness.

As we turn on the water faucet we can look deeply and see how precious the water is. We remember not to waste a single drop because there are so many people in the world who don’t even have enough to drink. While brushing our teeth we can make a vow to use loving speech.

The Most Venerable Nguyen-Sieu strongly agreed with Venerable Phap-Chon that Gathas are the foundation to train the young minds. It is the beginning for
cultivating mindfulness and meditation that enhance the stillness, self-regulation, and inner peace. According Thich Thien An (1975), Gatha is the embodiment and essence of Buddha’s teaching. He gave an example when a great Vietnamese King and Zen master Tran Nhan Tong left a Gatha before his death:

All things have no beginning;  
All things are without cessation;  
If you understand this,  
All the Buddhas are there.  
So how can there be anything coming and going? (as cited in Thich, T.-A., 1975, p. 108)

The spirit of non-attachment, letting go and not clinging on, is well articulated.

The Most Venerable Thich-Minh-Dat observed:

Having a goal is like what I have alluded to earlier. When working on something, from teaching to building temples, you need to put into perspective what your end goal is. It should not be a personal goal, but for the Buddha-Dharma. Actually building temples is only a small part. The Buddha has taught clearly that what you need to build is your mind/wisdom, not temples or estates. I am practicing based on that premise. I want to learn first before I do something. For example, if I want to build a temple, I need to know how to lead a temple first. I don’t consider the temple being my property, but an office or merely a temporary post. Once it is no longer a right place to practice, one needs to leave a temple. There should not be conflict. It doesn’t mean to be, then so be it. A monk keeps a temple not for his personal benefit but for the benefits of Dharma, Dharma transmission, and the survival of Buddha-Dharma. The Buddha has taught the concept of dependent origination or conditioned genesis (or interdependent arising). No phenomenon exists (or comes about) without depending on other phenomena or conditions around it.

The findings are eye-catching examples for all leaders. According to the participants, everything depends on one another and we are not the center of the universe. These values hold true in everyone; when one feels good about it, he or she will continue to do it and share with others. Practicing in Buddhism means cultivating merits, understanding, compassion, and wisdom as well as improving the mind. Through
diligent practice, it helps individuals and organizations develop antidotes for the shortcomings. All the unfavorable conditions and activities of the Thần, Khấu, Ý (body, speech, mind) will transform into favorable conditions, which reduce sufferings. The notion of “You can’t give something you don’t have” is vital for the Vietnamese Buddhist monks. Thus, they practice each day. The findings are in line with the condensed version of the teaching of Buddha in the Pháp Cú Sutra: Refrain from evil and do good, live simply keeping to basic needs, purify the mind.

d) They are humble regarding their contributions and lead with their sincere, good-hearted intentions. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ contributions are deeply connected with their communities and the surrounding, yet they are modest about their achievements. For instance, Venerable Phap-Chon, an Abbot and the Founding President of International Children Assistant Network (ICAN), founded two Buddhist meditation centers. He has been extensively involved in a well-known charity organization in the United States and abroad. Yet, he says, “I am just doing my job” and still leads by example and always practices in order to be happy and peaceful. As he mentioned: “Nowadays, we are seeing too much negative news every day in America; people experience a lot of violence. Therefore, the citizens have to practice non-violence, restraint, and responsibility and sharing these messages to benefit the whole community.” He continued:

Mindfulness and meditation is so crucial. Meditation is mindfulness; you got to be mindful in every thought and in every action. You have to train yourself by practicing meditation every day. You have to learn to examine what the Buddha taught, and you have to be honest to yourself. You have to live truthfully with yourself. When you are at peace, you are happy and the people around you will benefit from it.
Venerable Tue-Giac agreed with Venerable Phap-Chon and he reminded:

The work and duty of a monastic is to spread Dharma and nothing outside of what was taught by Buddha, which consists of: self-help, the helping of others, self-realization, and the spreading of awareness. Three other concepts that we will never forget are: practicing, learning, and taking action, which the Ven. of Trúc Lâm has taught. “Practicing is like your breath, learning is like drinking water, and working to help others is like eating.” Thus, when we are not practicing, it is like we are not breathing. When we are not learning, then we will be thirsty. And if we are not helping others with our actions, then we will be hungry (just like a lazy person who does not have anything to eat). Those three conditions are the most important to me. It helped with my practice to be more stable and helped the lay practitioners have more trust with the Three Jewels. For the self-help, the first thing is to live according with the precepts. The practice must be diligent, without backing down in order help the mind to achieve right concentration. Due to keeping the precepts, the mind is calm. When the mind is calm and concentrated, our own wisdom is illuminated. Therefore, wisdom and concentration are a complete pair that must go hand in hand.

Venerable Tinh-Man was one of the youngest monks of all the participants. He shared his lived experience that he conducted Buddhist services weekly, gave lectures on Buddhist Teachings (Dharma Teachings) every Sunday in Vietnamese for 30-50 practitioners, conducted weekly lectures of Buddhist Teachings (Dharma Teachings), and led meditation and chanting practice in English to a Western community of 10-15 practitioners. In addition, he led monthly two-day Mindfulness and Meditation Retreats in Vietnamese and English, including lectures on Buddhist teachings, Dharma discussions, and meditation as well as organized and led yearly An Bang Youth Retreat. In 2008, there were 10 monastics and over 300 practitioners attended the retreat to bridge the generational and communication gaps between the youths and their parents. He also organized annual Buddhist Ceremonies, which include, but are not limited to, the following: Vesak (Buddha’s Birthday), Ullumbana (Buddhist Mother’s Day), Lunar New Year. Each event attracted about 250-300 participants, yet he said his contribution was
limited. This is applicable not only to Venerable Tinh-Man’s Monastery, but almost all Vietnamese Buddhist temples have a similar schedule.

As the Most Venerable Minh-Dat contemplated his thoughts while he drank his tea, he sincerely explained when he opened up:

I’d like to discuss about the Dharma teaching. In Vietnam, although it is a challenge, but it is not much of a challenge, there is no language or cultural barrier. For the younger monks and nuns who do not have language barriers, their Buddhist knowledge is not as strong; hence, they need a lot of help. Even if they have good Dharma talks, they may lack real life practice. A good speech doesn’t always reflect a good practice. Some teachers may not like to hear that. ‘For example, I had a PhD at age 30. At 35, I had another PhD.’ My school knowledge is there, but what I lacked was practice experience. Hence, my teachings were just in general, and not at a deep level. In Buddhist terms, we call that deep level “innermost heart” or what is in one’s heart of hearts. The Buddha called that a core of Buddhist teaching. Modern Buddhism may run the risks of having a form but not substance (or true practice). If one compares Buddhism and science, or compares it with other things, then you may miss the boat. In that situation, one may appreciate Buddhism from a philosophical perspective, but not its innermost heart, its core [teaching] of Buddha-dharma. It’s not that you don’t need it (comparison). You can use it as a means to reach your audiences. In summary, first and foremost you need experience in practice. To have experience you need time. It is not something that can be achieved overnight. It’s not one year, three years, but it even could be five, ten, or a few decades. The more experience you have, the better, it’s my humble opinion.

The findings also reveal the characteristics of these monks as being patient, persevering, humble, and modest. The Most Venerable Minh-Dat once again added:

Since 1975, the most prominent success for us is that we have been able to build temples and infra-structures. But that is not what Buddhism is about. We need Buddhist teachers who are serious in their practice. That’s a harsh reality. If you are a really good teacher, you don’t even need a temple. Any place where there are 5, 10, 20 or 30 people who are willing to learn and practice, that’s considered a Sangha—a community that lives in harmony and awareness. The Sangha could be in a park, a parking lot, or any physical place. Nowadays, we have a lot of temples, but we also have some internal conflicts. It is so shameful that people even take their fights to court. It seems like we have not witnessed anything like that in the 2,000 years of Buddhist history. Remember the raft is not the shore... In 30 years we have not been able to establish a Buddhist teacher standard. Knowing English has to be one of the important standards. The difficult thing is
if the teacher only focuses on learning, then you may lack the experience in practice. If you only focus on building a temple, you may lack the knowledge necessary to be an effective teacher… Unfortunately having people like Venerable Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh is still rare. He is in the pre-1975 generation.

The Most Venerable Tinh-Tu, a participant in the focus group who founded five different Buddhist temples and/or Zen centers across the United States, summarized the Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ contributions as follows:

The life of monks and nuns, especially Vietnamese monks and nuns is similar to that of a lotus. When you ask, "Hello lotus, how do you offer benefits to people?" The lotus just smiles and doesn’t do anything. Just by admiring the beauty of the lotus, one can feel better and can be healed. Lotus doesn't need to do anything but just be. Similarly, a monk/nun’s life is very simple. We do not need to worry much about the past or future. Instead, we focus on practicing how to live with our Buddha nature and that in itself is beauty that can be shared to benefit others. Living together in harmony as a Sangha allows for nuns and monks to practice among each other. I remember almost 20 or 30 years ago I went to a Catholic monastery in Arkansas. The director of Catholic monastery asked me, “Please help me Master Tu, please share a form of practice with us, we would like to learn.” He asked me to read or share something. But I said, "I come here like a lotus.” He just looked at me. I didn't have anything to say.

The data show that the Vietnamese Buddhist monks are modest and often are not paying attention to their influence. Yet, they continue to contribute and dream for a better future for all. Venerable Thich Dao-Quang, a practicing psychologist, pointed out:

In our country, we need to open the new school system or practice centers that I call MBM: Meditation Before Meditation. I think it is the best model for the concept of continuing education in the long run. Nowadays, most of the time when people finish education, they do not have a tendency to put their knowledge into their daily practice.

For me, an MBM Center is the best place for all of our students and people in general, whether from high school or college, so that they can still maintain and put their learning into practice. The reason that I emphasize on a Meditation Before Meditation center is because anyone can feel comfortable and can enrich their spiritual life rather than just worry about what religion they should follow. They apply their learned methods at an MBM center on how to transform their negative behavior into a positive one and how to increase their self-esteem and
self-confidence. Once we emphasize on meditation and compassion, I think we travel on the right path.

Furthermore, as Vietnamese, we embrace our culture. We don't want to lose our roots and that's why I said, "We must practice the teaching of compassion, understanding, and wisdom, rather than just focus on the form and waste time debating who is wrong and is who right.” I love the concept of Buddhist practitioners. Right now, at the temple where I live, we have a mixed number of Buddhist practitioners and I told them that I'm not worried about how much you know about Buddhism. But I'm concerned about how much you can put in your practice. That's very important.

The Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ intention is to spread the Dharma and encourage everyone to rediscover their own Buddha natures, which ultimately lead to the Buddhahood. Their humble message and calling to the collective awakening in society must start at each individual’s thoughts and actions. This will lead to peaceful individuals, joyful families, transformative communities, and finally a harmonious society.

Furthermore, the most Venerable Thang-Hoan reminds everyone that in order for the Vietnamese to build and develop anything—including Buddhism for the Vietnamese people in the foreign land—it must be built on the foundation of compassion, morality, culture, and the heritage of Vietnamese. Their humble and positive attitudes and contributions are essential for all individuals and stakeholders including leaders, and educators. All transformation starts with an internal and enthusiastic effort to have a happier life for yourself and those around you. Thus, the spiritual dimension must be included in any leadership capacity. The ethical and moral tenets must be grounded and cultivated as a foundation to serve others.
Results and Interpretations

This section deliberates on the results of the phenomenological study as extricated from the findings in the previous section. The three themes that emerged from the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America with respect to their spiritual leadership were discussed. The analysis, discussions, and interpretations of the results and findings from Chapter 4 are the foundation for the recommendations presented in Chapter 5.

**Result 1: Vietnamese Buddhist Monks in America’s lived-experiences are dynamic, unique, and positively contribute to the society because of their spiritual leadership roles and obligations.**

The findings that emerged in the first theme regarding Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ mindful leadership styles are concentrated in six major areas: (a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America joined monkhood at a young age and escaped or immigrated to the United States due to different circumstances; (b) they took Bodhisattva vows to dedicate their lives for the benefit of others; (c) their monkhood is challenging and they must overcome many obstacles; (d) they learn from their own masters, practicing Buddha doctrines and shaping their own beliefs and practices to empower themselves and others; (e) their contributions and influences are mostly to the local communities and surrounding areas, especially to the Vietnamese communities as well as the Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Associations throughout the United States of America; and (f) they are content with who they are, and they are happy with what they are doing in the present time and circumstances.

The spirit of Buddhism is widely applied through meditation and the act of compassion. The spirit of meditation helps people to always be still or static in their
hearts and minds and have an awakened-spirit in their actions. This helps avoid the endless circles of suffering and, thus, build a peaceful and happy life. The spirit of compassion and altruism help construct the love between men to other beings and reduce the suffering caused by the killing of other animals. The Most Venerable Thang-Hoan added:

As a religious teacher, in order to have the leadership capacity, one must meet these three criteria: Intention Education (stance, purpose), Speech education (propaganda), and Leading-by-Example Education (symbolism). Whatever one is doing, it must have a specific and clear purpose. And when it comes for others to listen and trust, your words and actions must be parallel as well.

He urged us that in order to lead, the spiritual leaders also must meet three criteria: annual retreat (based on the strength and position of the organization), coming back to your source (inherit and promote the ideas, the power of their masters), and community (be united communities via mutual respect and connections). Here is an example of the art of cultivating peace and happiness from Venerable Minh-Dung of Quang Thien Temple in Southern California.

Peace looks like a shadow. You see it when you walk, your shadow is behind. You cannot catch peace and happiness, you must stay still for the shadow to appear. You see the meaning of life (is) around us, we see that. We observe it. We get the meaning from life; that peace comes right away. It may look like these environments are very lonely. They are quiet and sad for some. But for the one who practices meditation, they love to live alone and are happy.

The nuance of Buddhist monks is still at the foundation of practice. Venerable Thien-Duyen pointed out:

When I practice, I have a happy voice. I share with them what I earned, what I have and what I learned. I share the reality in my practice because you know, it is the experience from practice. I am happy, I am young, but I have a chance to service all people, so that's why I experience different cultures, see different people, sometimes good moods and bad moods, sometimes something easy to do, difficult to do, and many different kinds of people. So I am very grateful to these
people that has given me a chance to learn from them and to practice for myself. And I am happy, because I believe the way of practice makes people able to change their minds. Although Buddha have taught this in the sutra, people read a thousand times and they don't practice, they don't taste how sweet it is, how much of a miracle, or how happy it is.

For the late Most Venerable Thich Thien-An (1975), the essence of a Buddhist monk is non-attachment:

The spirit of non-attachment is beautiful, illustrated by the life of the Buddha. When he was still a prince, married to a lovely wife and the heir to his father’s throne, what did he do? He renounced his family, wealth, and power and fled to the mountains to meditate upon the way to truth. After his Enlightenment, the Buddha continued to exhibit the attitude of non-attachment (p. 108).

Most of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks in this research were ordained as Buddhist monks in Vietnam. Due to different and varied circumstances and the complication of the Vietnam War, they resettled in the United States. Now they are playing significant roles in their respective communities, not only for the Vietnamese American Buddhist communities, but also America Buddhist communities. Their selflessness (the concept of non-self is one of the distinguishing teachings of Buddhism) or the act of taking Bodhisattva vows reveals their determination, devotion, and the spirit of service for the betterment of all beings. They are the frontiers and champions in their own rights to bring to the people the messages of peace, determination, understanding, dedication, and compassion.

**Result 2: Their leadership style is characterized as authentically leading by example, basing decisions upon the core values of mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom.**

Vietnamese Buddhist monks are committed to their practices by taking Bodhisattva vows. They abide by their precepts and follow the guidelines of their Zen monasteries or temples. In their daily spiritual practices, they do meditative sessions, chanting, and sharing the Dharma. Their practices involve 24-hour a day mindfulness in
Vietnamese Buddhist monks often use Gatha—a form of reminder in helping others with the cultivation of mindfulness. This meditative reminder sets up a virtuous attitude and practice throughout the day. Being authentic and truthful to oneself is crucial in leading a group of people or an organization. The monks establish a mixed routine and a regular pattern of daily meditation, which helps to pave the path of self-actualization and realization.

For instance, the Most Venerable Tinh-Tu of Kim Son Monastery in Watsonville, California—also a participant in the focus group—points out the aspect of authentically leading by example of the spiritual leaders:

For me everything is small and simple. First of all, I respect people. Like when I raise nuns and monks, I spend many hours being close with them. I share the tea, and make tea myself. I raise a topic, like this morning, I listened to everyone. You have any difficult things or feelings, let me know, and we can discuss it. Listening and discussing, that's very important and I be humble... I get close to them by making and serving tea, listening, discussing, and sharing the energy of smiling. [Because of this], we know each other very well.

They feel very happy and are friendly with their master. I cannot completely teach them things of teaching, but I think, from studying from the people around, from my disciples to monks and nuns, we become close together. We become equal, with rights, equal to anything to each other.

Being on the same side as them, and easy to listen, easy to share, easy to do. Not only inside, but outside, sometimes I do that. Each day, I practice: 1) Be close with each other; 2) Practice deep listening; 3) Discussing and sharing. should not make people feel that we are higher them, in a higher position than them. We should have equal rights.

On the other hand, Venerable Tue-Giac is more specific. He added: “I followed what Ven. [Thich-Thanh-Tu] set up, which include a path to follow; a way to set up, run, manage, spread out the tasks, a proper way to practice rules and regulation.” As he recalled:

The value and core of Buddhism is wisdom and concentration. It is by doing so, that Buddha became fully enlightened. The Arahats also used this to end rebirth
as well as the Patriarchs, who through wisdom and concentration, achieved total freedom.

We now follow the footsteps of Buddha, so no matter what Buddhist sect you follow, the final destination is still wisdom and concentration; which means to realize our true mind. This is especially emphasized in the Zen tradition. The Vietnamese Trúc Lâm Zen, which was rediscovered by the Ven. (Thich-Thanh-Tu), focused on the idea that through Zen practice, the practitioner can attain enlightenment right here and now. Meaning that right at that moment, you are deluded or awake; that’s all. The moment you are deluded, it means that you are human, but the moment you are awake, you are Buddha. But enlightened to what? Just awakened to our own delusion and nothing else.

Again, their leadership style is being authentic and its core values are mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom. The findings also are aligned with other studies.

According to Jinpa (2010):

> Compassion, as elucidated in the Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT) protocol, is a multidimensional process comprised of four key components: (1) an awareness of suffering (cognitive/empathic awareness), (2) sympathetic concern related to being emotionally moved by suffering (affective component), (3) a wish to see the relief of that suffering (intention), and (4) a responsiveness or readiness to help relieve that suffering (motivational). (p. 1118)

Meanwhile, Schoeberlein and Sheth (2009) discovered the value of mindfulness and added:

> Master teachers are mindful teachers, aware of themselves and attuned to their students. Mindful teaching nurtures a learning community in which students flourish academically, emotionally, and socially—and teachers thrive professionally and personally. Teaching mindfulness directly to students augments to the effects of the teacher’s presence by coaching youth to exercise simple, practical, and universal attention skills themselves. These two approaches are mutually reinforcing and benefit everyone in the classroom. Mindfulness is a conscious, purposeful way to tuning in to what’s happening in and around us. This specific approach to paying attention and honing awareness improves mental focus and academic performance. (p. 1)

Furthermore, they agreed that if everyone practiced those five precepts, then there would be no need for so many laws or prisons to lockup inmates. Vietnamese Buddhist monks pointed out that generally, people are not aware that the root cause of their action
is due to the bankruptcy of that individual’s inner mind, which is caused by their
greed, anger, and ignorance. As Venerable Tue-Giac pointed out:

Looking around at society, we can see that the spirit of moral and ethics is going
down drastically due to the imbalance between materialism and spirituality.
Nowadays, most of mankind only follows the materialistic life. They only follow
the enjoyment of their senses on the outside, and thus, have forgotten their inner
value. Therefore, how do we balance out life in this society? This is what the
Buddha discovered; clearly the root that brings about suffering for humankind
from the old days till now, is happening each day throughout the world. The
causes of all this suffering, which happens every day, from which you hear about
throughout Newspapers and TVs, all fall under these categories: killing and
murder, stealing and robbing, sexual crimes, scandals and child molestation, lies
and trickeries, drunks and addiction. These five categories are what bring pain
and suffering to human life and all the chaos in this society.

He also wondered and continued as if he was attempting to finding the solution:

And in this day and age, people build prisons to lock up, who? And of course we
cannot find any other root cause aside from the five things that people cannot
keep from doing: killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and addiction.
Therefore, Buddha sees clearly the root cause that brings about an unhappy life
for humans and society. Buddha taught us [that] in order to live a happy [life] for
ourselves and be a good factor for the good of society, then we have to follow
these five precepts. No killing; then no one will be murdered. No stealing or
robbing; then no one will be at a loss and we ourselves will not be put in prison
for our crimes. Then we have to live with right actions, not evil doings. We have
to live true to ourselves and true to others and avoid getting drunk. Ones who can
follow these five precepts will have a happy and harmonious life as well as
contribute a good part to the society. A bad society is due to have individuals who
do not follow these precepts, thus making the society a bad one. And if the
people in our society are good, then they will create a good society. Therefore, it
is important to let people see…the true value and benefits of these fives peace
solutions and apply them to society. Then, humankind will be more peaceful,
happy and harmonious.

According to Vietnamese Buddhist monks, lead-by-example, follow the precepts,
and practice mindfulness meditation are contributing factors to a peaceful society.

Venerable Minh-Dung of Southern California whole-heartedly agreed that leading-by-
example is the key in spiritual leadership. He said, “Absolutely. That’s because…what
is the achievement of Buddhism? Happiness, peace, and wisdom. This is why you become a monk, because we do not want to attest with the society because many are suffering. We choose another way to live in peace. Where is peace? It is within us.” He also emphasized:

We are not people who are just talking. We live, practice, and see the peaceful results that we (are to) show to other people. For instance, I tell people: “Don’t be angry,” but after that they observe that my attitude is also angry. You see, that’s not right. And I must say, anywhere in the world, you can say whatever, but you must live and practice. The [Buddha’s] doctrines reveal that. (There are) tons of Buddha books in the libraries and online. We do not need that. We need the one whose practice contributes to the people around.

Venerable Dao-Quang of Tam Bao Temple in Louisiana pointed out that the basic ethical and spiritual practices, as spiritual leaders, are obedience and following the precepts. He also emphasized the importance of practicing the seven elements in the equation: (a) putting love and understanding into action, (b) developing monastic regulations, (c) practicing mindful thinking and mindful speech, (d) practicing being patient in any situation, (e) doing good things consistently, (f) practicing right effort, and (g) cultivating compassion, equanimity, and wisdom. Venerable Tu-Luc of Pho Tu Temple in Northern California, a participant from the focus group, emphasized:

That is the basis that we have to obey and follow. To me, if I want my members to do good things; first, I have to try my best. That is the first thing. I said, "You know, if I want our temple to have a regular meeting, chanting." I have to be there with them. That is a way that we put ourselves in a situation to be an example for other members.

To me, the first step is to start with yourself. Second, to open your heart to offer the benefits to others. I can now be the cause of the Buddhism. We always think about the benefits, the goodness, of other people around us. That is the way we can practice compassion and loving-kindness. Not only to people, to humans, but also to other sentient beings. We have to think about the environment and about all the people who do not have good living conditions. By doing that, we open our hearts and practice loving-kindness in our daily life. That is the way, as Buddha says.
Starting from yourself, you will bring benefits to the community and everybody around you. To me, everything must start with you. Then, with your deep belief in your heart, with your good skill, you can bring peace and happiness to other people in the world. As indicated, the leadership is also based upon the compassion and wisdom.

Furthermore, Rahula (1974) described ten moral principles as the notion of being compassion and wisdom:

1. Liberality, generosity, and charity: To perform good and charitable deeds.
2. Precepts: To restrain the way of thinking, speaking, and acting.
3. Giving: To give assets or to sacrifice everything for helping others out of suffering and troubles.
4. Honesty and integrity: To be free from fear or favor in the discharge of duties; to be sincere in virtue.
5. Kindness and gentleness: To be kind, gentle, and courteous to all living beings.
6. Austerity in habits: To practice and lead a simple life; to eliminate evil desires and deeds.
7. Free from hatred: To be able to stop and to eradicate any kind of hatred and ill-will.
8. Nonviolence: To exercise a nonviolent way of thinking, speaking, and acting; to promote peace by avoiding and preventing conflict.
10. Justice: Non-opposition, non-obstruction; to be persistent in fairness and to rule in harmony with people. (p. 85)

The findings that emerged in the second theme regarding Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership styles are concentrated in four major areas: (a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America learned from the living example of their masters and lead-by-example themselves; (b) They practice meditation daily and are mindful of their thinking and actions in every moment; (c) Their practices are based upon being compassionate to themselves and other beings, for the benefit of themselves and others in the present and in the future; and (d) They balance their hectic schedule with mindfulness and lead the congregation, laypersons, and others.
**Result 3: Through their practices, their presence, and their contributions to the welfare of others, they bring about peace of mind and happiness for themselves and for others in society.**

The findings that emerged in the last theme regarding Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership styles are concentrated in four major areas: (a) The foundation for peace in the Vietnamese Buddhist monks and others is the mindset of the Bodhisattva (making a difference for all beings) and is the practice of precepts, which transform negative into positive thoughts and actions; (b) Their practice of calming the mind; opening the heart and soul; and seeing others as their colleagues, collaborators, and teachers brings peace-of-mind, optimism, and loving-kindness to themselves and others; (c) their own happiness, which is fundamental to their leadership and spiritual roles, depends upon their daily activities and mindfulness practice; and (d) they are humble regarding their contributions and lead with their sincere, good-hearted intentions. As Venerable Tu-Luc, a participant in the focus group, pointed out:

Through our practice as monks, or nuns, we bring positive energy, happiness, and peace to the society. For instance, I went to McDonald's one time and bought French fries. I sat down and before I ate dinner, I tried to have a mindful way, to be thankful for the food. I did it the same as I do in the temple. We called it a Tam Đé Quán—three things we should remember. Don’t do the harm to people; do good things to everybody; and remember to be mindful in your daily life.

I do that. The people around, they know, and they ask me if I am a monk. I say, "Yes, I am a monk." I do the same thing in the airplane when I come over there. I sit down quietly, a few minutes of meditation to pray, especially when the airplane takes off or lands. That means through our practice, in our daily life, whether in the temple, in the monasteries, or anywhere, we already made a very deep contribution of peace and happiness to the people.

He continued to give an example:

We don't mention our life here at Kim Son Monasteries. Thousands and thousands of people visit Kim Son and they bring back a very happy environment to their family, to their daily life. In America, of course, we know this is a country of modern technology with many kinds of material worth. What they
need right now is non-violence. They need peace. They need the positive energy for the younger generation.

In school, they start to teach about the mindfulness. In society, they mention about how to eat right because of the obesity of the elementary students. To me, through our practice, and our lifestyles of the monastic people, I think that is the way we continue to make a very deep and valuable contribution to the American society.

The Most Venerable Tinh-Tu—a Zen Master as some called him, also a participant in the focus group study, added:

Some monks and nuns hurry to make a business, to make money. I said, "Why are you doing business, like opening some business, like market or something else. For what?" They say, "For money." I say, Money, for what? "Money to build the temple." I say, you don't need it. You just sit there. You just smile. You just take deep breath. You are just like a strong mountain and people will be there a lot. Why are you running around? You will get tired. But keep in mind, you cannot continue to do something like that.

Monks and nuns need to go back to their true home, true mind. True home and true mind is a very important spiritual temple. A true temple is not the physical structure outside of oneself, because that, like a form, it changes and it falls down someday. So, when you are able to go back to your true mind that is the true home. When you are in your true mind and you are in your true home, people will follow you.

He advised:

All monks and nuns join together in small groups and practice every day. They do nothing. Just enjoy walking meditation, sitting meditation, and just to take a deep breath. Buddhism is like a very special mirror for the king and the people around him. Right now, we work too much; we do too much. Some temples, they are very busy, and the monks and nuns are all tired. I think it is because everyone follows different ways of the Buddha. During Buddha time, monks and nuns do nothing except for being there for himself, herself, and for the people around them. Our society need more like that.

Finally, the Most Venerable Tinh-Tu declared, “Be lotus, yourself!” The Most Venerable Thai-Sieu of Fremont, California summarized that Buddhism does not force anyone to convert or choose a particular way to practice. People choose whichever way or method of their choice, for instance, Pure Land, Tibet Buddhism, or Zen. He
mentioned that the first ancient Buddha said, "Meditation is the only road leading to
the peaceful liberation or awakening." Pure Land is the same thing, whatever path you
choose, as long as the body, mind, and heart is quiet and at peace; it is the right way."
Finally, as others, he advocates these things: first know yourself, the Dharma, the
practice, and the taking Bodhisattva vows to benefit all beings.

Again, the Most Venerable Tinh-Tu also shared, “Even if you are holding a
significant role in society, it is important to self-reflect and control our own lives.
Including our own emotions, thoughts, speeches, and behaviors.” He suggested that
people could do so through the two practices:

First, keep our body and mind healthy. Second, be mindful with our environment
including: family, peers, cultural, society, and universal worldview, to see that our
body is not only one; it is a part of the society. Everything is interdependent with
social resonance, this is why we must cultivate a healthy body and mind. We
need to practice. A healthy body will lead to a healthy mind and a spirited soul
that has all five elements, which nurture us. They are: Trust, Insight,
Concentration, Mindfulness, and Wisdom." When these elements are fruitful,
they will turn into “power or capacity, character power, and intellectual force and
power." Once all the conditions are met, these five factors will create a positive
synergy with society.

According to Venerable Dao-Quang, there are many spiritual values in Buddhism,
but he emphasizes three of the most important ones (a) having high morals; (b)
maintaining mindfulness; and (c) cultivating wisdom and compassion. He intoned:

I practice as much as I can and incorporate these values, principles and precepts
into my own thought, speech, and action. I believe that everything changes
constantly, moment by moment; therefore, my leadership style is flexible and
adaptable to the current situation. I believe that life is interdependent, so as a
leader I have to see that I am not separate from my followers. We work together,
and we share life values and responsibilities together.

Similarly, Venerable Minh-Thien—a practicing counselor and academic advisor
of San Jose, California—summarized his perceptions:
a) Love thyself more – means practices more on yourself and expand your compassion and loving-kindness to others.
b) Perceive that your own happiness plays a big part in your leadership role. If you’re not happy, your leadership skill will suffer.
c) Success is not accounted by only benefits but together with your own happiness and others.
d) Lead-by-example.

Venerable Minh-Dung was more straightforward when he shared: “To help them, I have to teach them on how to reduce the level of stress and depression in the society and bring them peace in life and in the family.” He continued:

You see we have to exercise every day for the mind and the body. The body and the mind [must be] together. Whatever we see, we think that might harm environment, harm other people, we should try our best to prevent it from happening. Whatever we do, just little things, we just have to look around. We have planted many flowers not only for us; we try to give something nice from us to others. You see that we try our best to do whatever we can to contribute to the people around us first and foremost. We shouldn’t speak of doing anything for the world until we have help the people surrounding ourselves first.

The Most Venerable Thai-Sieu agreed with Venerable Minh-Dung as he pointed out that one needs to know our identity and what we are doing. Venerable Minh-Dung mentioned that many youth do not quite know their identity yet and often they have an identity crisis. He clarified:

Who are you? Who you are is a very important question. We should recognize who we are. That means something is wrong or something is right. It’s wrong to see the way people always suffer, or that in America, (people) are so lonely, so materialistic, such and such, you see? You have to think about it. We recognize ourselves first, then secondly, start to work on that, what caused your problem, what causes us suffering and what’s the key to open that?

Venerable Minh-Dung paused to enjoyed his cup of Jasmine tea and then he declared:

Let’s take water for an example: we don’t need to bring the water for the ones who are not thirsty. The water is valuable for the one who needs it most. Buddhism is the same way. We cannot bring the water for everyone. They do not
even want it. Who needs the water comes to the temple. He takes the water. The teachings provide the water. They can reduce the thirsty. Even if they are young, they are old, or they are middle age. If they need water we can provide it. If they don’t need, waste of time. Do you agree? Laughing.

Venerable Thien-Duyen gave his insights:

Everything focused on the moral is focused on respect. When we respect others, we have the respect of all people; then nothing is a problem. Because if we do not respect them, they do not respect us.” Overall, he pointed out one last time, “To get to know others, we have to open our heart and practice more compassion.

The Most Venerable Thang-Hoan pointed out that the message of peace and compassion must build on the foundation of compassion, ethics, morality, and spirituality. He gave the following advice:

For Children: One must show piety, diligence, cultivation of virtue, and a desire to be progressive to make differences for oneself and others. Understanding your own inner values and the value of your belief and religion. Be aware of your obligations and responsibilities; continue the paved positive path of your ancestors; practice self-discipline, preserve and develop the message of hope, love, understanding, compassion and wisdom.

For Parents/Adults: You are the foundation, the roof, the pillars of your home, teaching your children and others by example, teaching by your own mindful speech and teaching by your own positive thoughts. You must be the examples in any environment.

For Sangha: He reminded, "The tiger leaves the forest, he fails; the Sangha leaves his community, he also fails." So, practice and preserve Precepts/Sila, self-discipline. Study, maintain and share the teachings of the Buddha. Practice diligently. Attend and practice at the An Cư Kiệt Ha (Annual summer retreat for monks or nuns), be united and together build and develop, promote our Vietnamese culture and our traditional religion for all Vietnamese people at home and abroad.

The studies of Davidson et al. (2003), Hanson (2013), and Kabat-Zinn (2003) supported these findings. As Hanson (2013)—a neuropsychologist, who is using neuroscience to enhance psychological healing, everyday well-being, and self-actualization—pointed out,
A person’s inner strengths include peacefulness, contentment, and love, as well as resilience, confidence, determination, and insight. These strengths help you cope with the hard things in life, recover from stress, heal old pain, maintain your well-being, get things done at home and work, and be patient and caring toward others. (p. 15)

He also pointed out:

Simply observing your mind is extremely useful, but you also need to decrease what’s negative and increase what’s positive. My focus is on increasing the positive: growing flowers in the garden of the mind. Which means changing the structures of your brain. All mental activity—sights and sounds, joys and sorrows—is based on underlying neural activity. Repeated mental/neural activity leaves lasting changes in neural structure: what’s called experience-dependent neuroplasticity. This means you can use your mind to change your brain to change your mind for the better. (p. 16)

Again, as Hanson mentioned, “The best way to develop greater happiness and other inner strengths is to have experiences of them, and then help these good mental states become good neural traits” (p. 16). These traits are the lived-experience of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks, who have a combined total of 827 years of practice-based experience.

Lastly, it is significant to note that in most of the research, participants mentioned Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh by name. His influence and contribution to the West are well known. He is a Zen master, scholar, and teacher, or Thay as his followers and admirers call him. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh’s influence and contributions have reached many individuals and communities nationally and internationally. According to the Deer Park Monastery’s website, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh is

One of the best known and most respected Zen masters in the world today, poet, peace and human rights activist, Thich Nhat Hanh has led an extraordinary life. Born in central Vietnam in 1926, Nhat Hanh was ordained a Buddhist monk in 1942, at the age of sixteen (para. 1). In the midst of our society's emphasis on speed, efficiency, and material success, Thich Nhat Hanh's ability to walk calmly with peace and awareness and to teach us to do the same has led to his
enthusiastic reception in the West. Although his mode of expression is simple, his message reveals the quintessence of the deep understanding of reality that comes from his meditations, his Buddhist training, and his work in the world. (para. 10)


In Europe, beside the Plum village, which has four hamlets: Upper Hamlet, Son Ha Temple, Lower Hamlet, and New Hamlet, he founded the European Institute of Applied Buddhism (EIAB), in Waldbröl, Germany, 2008. In Asia, (aside from his native country of Vietnam), he founded the Thai Plum Village International Practice Center, Pak Chong District, Nakorn Ratchasima, Thailand. Additionally, he founded the Plum Village in Hong Kong in 2010 and established the Asian Institute of Applied Buddhism, Lantau Island, Hong Kong, 2011. In Australia, he founded Nhãp Luu (Entering Stream) Meditation Practice Centre in Beaufort, Victoria, Australia in 2011.
One of the core practices of Thich Nhat Hanh and Plum Village is to help individuals weave mindfulness into all their daily life’s activities such as eating, walking, working and sitting, doing dishes, cleaning as well as just simply enjoying something. The Plum Village tradition asked its participants and followers to “observes a monastic way of life year round; we ask our guests to observe our way of mindful and ethical living as expressed in the Five Mindfulness Trainings. The Five Mindfulness Trainings are the foundation of the Plum Village community, bringing happiness and meaning to all that we do” (Plum Village Mindfulness Practice Center, 2014, para. 2).

Overall, the findings were also supported by other research studies. According to Ho (2009):

Vietnamese Buddhist teachers have always taught people to live: in harmony, in spiritual peace, in continuous training, and in never-ending learning. And always inspired by the Buddha’s teachings and guided by Buddhist educational principles. Respect, tolerance, syncretism, humanistic value, morality, high ethical codes of conduct, learning, and behavior are all underscored in Vietnamese Buddhist education. At the same time, diversity is given as much freedom as possible --- which has prevented Vietnamese Buddhism from becoming a dogmatic doctrine. Vietnamese Buddhism remains dynamic, which over time seems to be to its advantage. (p. 252)

With all the gathered data, the researcher went on to interpret the discoveries of the essence of leaders and leadership styles of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks. From these discoveries, the researcher found five main leadership strategies or statics: (a) Leading from the Inside Out, (b) The Notion of Daily Practice, (c) Leading-by-Example, (d) Congruence and (e) The Notion of Completeness (see Figure 8).

The five core leadership principles lie in this particular order for specific reasons. First the notion of Leading from the Inside Out is the foundation and mindset. It can be a mission statement and a vision of mindful leaders who embrace the path of leading others
to a happy, harmonious, and compassionate society. Second, the *Notion of Daily Practice* is crucial to find one’s personal development, improvement, and transformation. However, that mindset is not enough, it requires a skill-set that can be obtained through daily practice. Thus, the *Notion of Daily Practice* is the stepping-stone for success. For the Vietnamese Buddhist monks, abiding by the 250 precepts is the way to harvest their understanding and merits. With their determination, daily chores such as mindfulness practices, chanting, and meditation they cultivate serenity, calmness, concentration and the wisdom needed to lead. Third is the notion of *Leading by Example*, which is a temperament and nuance of any leader. *Leading by Example* is the spirit of service all the research participants. According to Venerable Thich-Minh-Thien, what separates good leaders from great leaders is the spirit of service in their leadership. *Leading by Example* has been the soul and spirit of many Vietnamese Buddhist monks for generations. The fourth notion is *Congruence*, the connection and harmony of different aspects. Its quality of agreeing between alternative viewpoints and different findings is what makes it appropriate and suitable. The fifth and last notion is the *Notion of Completeness*, which closes the circle, and is the completion of all. This notion perfects a human being, all leaders would like to leave a legacy, which completes their life. This *Notion of Completeness* reveals the sense of satisfaction, self-fulfillment, and self-actualization of a leader or any leader. Through the essence of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ lived-experiences, they have to overcome many hurdles to become authentic and passionate leaders to serve the community and society at large. The researcher extracted from them the five core leadership principles, which will be addressed in more detail below.
Figure 8. Principles of mindful leadership.

**Five Leadership Strategies**

1. **Leading from the Inside Out.** For leadership practice and implementation, the research findings revealed the notion of being or leading from the inside out, living
inside out, and transforming from the inside out. Leading from the Inside Out is a mission statement and a vision of any leader. It is the wisdom accumulated from the other four leadership strategies that will be further explained. These are the leadership’s beliefs, practices, values, and attitudes that leaders should possess in order to lead effectively and efficiently in the 21st century. The notion of being or leading from the inside out is a concept and practice in which Vietnamese Buddhist monks imply that individuals cannot give something they do not have. Thus, in order to give or share Dharma, that individual must have learned and practiced Dharma first. Living inside out is the force of life. For instance, consider this metaphor of an egg: If there is enough force and pressure coming from the outside, the eggshell will crack and destroy a potential life—negativities happen. However, if there is enough force and pressure coming from the inside, the eggshell will crack and a chick is hatched, thus its life begins—positivities happen. Leading from the Inside Out gives life and positive results.

Obtaining the habit of mind of Leading from the Inside Out for studying and applying mindful practices into leadership styles processes a means—a skillful approach—to a solution in the modern leadership and governance. The notion of Leading from the Inside Out enhances a new perspective and understanding that there is the notion of completeness or there can be completeness, which completes the journey of leadership, in the work leaders do with other human beings. The research findings reveal the notion: The mindful leader is the one who leads and lives inside–out with understanding, compassion, and wisdom. It is this new understanding that makes emergent and mindful leadership much more relevant. Vietnamese Buddhist monks also characteristically summarize, “Peace and happiness start within and that they spread out
just like a drop of oil on water.” It spreads gradually. Furthermore, the art of obtaining peace is through the cultivation of self-awareness or the beginning stage of meditative practices.

2. The Notion of Daily Practice. The findings also revealed two major notions: The idea of daily practice and the manifestation of beliefs to make this particular society better. Vietnamese Buddhist monks have a solid/resilient belief in the teachings of the Buddha and carry on that belief through their daily practice, which is the bridge to extend what they believe into solid actions. Their daily practices include abiding to the 250 precepts, practices of mindfulness, chanting, and meditation to ensure an inner peace, the cultivation of serenity, calmness, concentration, and wisdom for themselves, which then spreads and embeds leadership characteristics into others. The idea of daily practice and the manifestation of beliefs extends into a really interesting area and is the people’s need in society. All leaders must have their core values and belief system, or philosophy. However, its manifestation is the key and daily practice, a requirement, in order to turn their belief into something fruitful. Likewise, they need to help others no matter what their leadership position is—whether it is in the family or an organization, in politics or religion, wherever it is there is education—to begin to promote the notion that leaders need some kind of daily practice to center themselves in relationship to other human beings.

Practicing mindfulness is an essential tool for balanced, contented, thoughtful, and productive leaders. According to findings, the benefits of practicing meditation and mindfulness include the feeling of ease and calmness. It helps with concentration and attaining a better focus. While it decreases negativities, such as anxiety and stress level,
it increases awareness both inside and out. It also helps with the development of empathy, understanding, wisdom, and compassion. These are the essential life-skills for all individuals. It is pertinent to note that the notion of daily practice exists in all faiths. No matter what religion individuals belong to, once we go back to our own religion and practice, the fruitful results will be present. Put differently, this foundation is not only in Buddhism, but also in all religions. Vietnamese Buddhist monks emphasize that foundation is the daily practice. They urge that whatever one individual’s belief system is, one should go back to the beliefs and core values and practice them diligently. Only then that individual will harvest peace, ease of mind, and happiness.

3. **Leading-by-Example.** The Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership style—considered as authentically leading by example from their daily practices—is transformative for themselves and others. Vietnamese Buddhist monks learn these leading by example styles from their masters. They practice and encourage others to lead by their own examples, actions, and intentions so as to make the world a wonderful place to live. They are the characteristics of mindful leadership. In leadership, it is these kinds of character traits, such as being mindful and responsive, grit, courage, and self-compassion, that are implementable. Thoughts and action must go hand-in-hand, that is the mentality and practice of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks.

4. **Congruence.** Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership style has both an authentic component and congruent component central to their daily practices of meditation, of mindfulness and of chanting. That notion of congruence and authenticity is there. It runs across all three of these because they contribute to their society around them in a very deep, meaningful way on a continuing basis. It is the Vietnamese
Buddhist monks’ belief that everything is interdependent with everything else. Thus, the sense of mutual respect and the showing of gratitude is revealed during the study. Likewise, their understanding and practice of the Buddhist’s concept of interdependence—the world is interconnected, as well as all life on planet earth—are the foundation for social justice and a more harmonious society. This finding is also supported by Bass and Steidlmeier’s (1998) transformational leadership on virtue and moral characters as well as Burns’s (1978) theory of social-historical perspective that incorporates the moral development and mutual interdependence of human interaction.

The findings show the primary notion that Vietnamese Buddhist monks are in a constant state of living their leadership. They are practicing and living what they believe. There is a great congruence between who they are as men who practice the Buddhist faith and how they interact with others. Vietnamese Buddhist monks take Bodhisattva vows for the greater good of all beings; they are congruent between their own and others’ Buddha nature, practices, and perceptions.

5. The Notion of Completeness. The findings suggest a need for spiritual dimension in leadership to have a sense of completeness. The notion of wholeness can be seen via the Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ practice, morality, and spirituality. This Notion of Completeness helps them feel complete as human beings and be unified and whole. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ spiritual leadership style, like many others, has the core values of understanding, compassion, and courage. Yet their approach is also holistic as they are connecting themselves with others and the environment or communities where they live. They serve the community well since the spirit of service is fundamental. What is unique about Vietnamese Buddhist monks, however, is that they
add the “mindfulness” component into their leadership flair. It completes the whole notion that leadership has a human being component that has an intellectual (wisdom) and spiritual (practice) dimension.

The viewpoints of the research participants in this study are consistent with Northouse (2004) who argued that there must be ethics in leadership. According to Northouse, “Ethics is central to leadership because of the nature of the process of influence, the need to engage followers to accomplish mutual goals, and the impact leaders have on establishing the organization’s values” (p. 307). Furthermore, Northouse (2004) also pointed out the five components of ethical leadership: (a) respect for others, (b) serving others, (c) showing justice, (d) manifestation of honesty, and (e) building communities. In addition, Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership styles add the mindfulness component into their leadership flair. It completes the whole notion that leadership has virtues, values, and practice. The practice of mindfulness is backed by researchers Carlson and Garland (2005), Kabat-Zinn (1990), and Wingard (2005). They suggested there are positive benefits in practicing mindfulness in both the workplace and the medical field. Kabat-Zinn (1990) and Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) also revealed that mindfulness-based interventions enhance improvements in self-awareness and chronic illness conditions and promote well-being.

Overall, the ultimate goal of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks is to enable individuals and society to be more harmonious, peaceful, and happy. This is comparable to their authenticity and determination on mindfulness and awareness as individuals and society to become congruent with others in both the societal and spiritual worlds, which is central to leadership. That element of leading by example is just that congruence or
that unity between who they are as Buddhist practitioners and their leadership or intersection with others. That notion of congruence and authenticity is intertwined. It runs across all three because they contribute to the society in a very deep, meaningful way on a continual basis. What the researcher found in the research findings is apparent and remarkable.

Summary of Findings, Results, and Interpretations

Chapter 4 systematically presented the findings of this phenomenological study. In addition, it displayed the descriptive qualitative approach with information from quantitative data, artifacts analyses, and a personal research journal. There were 14 participants who are the Abbots of Buddhist temples. In fact, they established 22 monasteries, temples, or practice centers. There were 827 lived-years with all of their ages combined. There were 364 lived-years in the United States of America with 513 years combined of practice. Furthermore, the average age of the Abbots was 59 years old. A detailed analysis of the data and interpretation of the results was also presented.

Three main themes that emerged from the study include: (a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America and their lived-experience are dynamic, unique, and positively contribute to the society because of their spiritual leadership roles and obligations; (b) their leadership style is characterized as authentically leading by example, basing decisions upon the core values of mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom; and (c) through their practices, their presence, and their contributions to the welfare of others, they bring about peace of mind and happiness for themselves and others in the society. The three major themes contain 14 sub-findings. After analyzing and evaluating the data, the researcher was aware that there was a vast amount of data and the results could be
triangulated to produce a powerful confirmation. The sub-findings were discussed and inferred, and the interpretations were imbedded in the findings of appropriate literature. Overwhelmingly, the understanding of the research findings provided the establishment for the recommendations in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The Buddha was like a doctor, treating the spiritual ills of the human race. The path of practice he taught was like a course of therapy for suffering hearts and minds. This way of understanding the Buddha and his teachings dates back to the earliest texts, and yet is also very current. Buddhist meditation practice is often advertised as a form of healing...The Buddha's path consisted not only of mindfulness, concentration, and insight practices, but also of virtue, beginning with the five precepts. In fact, the precepts constitute the first step in the path...for wounded minds. (Bhikkhu, 1997, para. 1, 3)

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to explore the phenomenon of the lived-experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in their spiritual and leadership positions and to understand how their spiritual leadership practices would be models of moral and ethical leadership for others in the larger society. The study was designed to identify through these experiences how Buddhist spiritual values and practices would be woven into daily lives of others in the greater society.

Within this chapter are answers to the three research questions directing this study, as presented in Chapter 1, and offered here as conclusions. Concluding the chapter are recommendations for leadership and for future research. Emerging from this phenomenological research is a rich tapestry portraying the leadership of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America. The patterns of meaning will have the potential for generalization to the practice of leadership in other circumstances, as well as within various organizations and sectors. Patterns of meaning that could be generalized are summarized in this introduction and are noted specifically in some of the chapter’s recommendations.
Unequivocally, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and understand, through the essence and nuance of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ lived-experiences, Buddhist spiritual values and practices that can be woven into everyday leaders’ lives to make a greater impact in society. As reported from the findings, meditation, wisdom-based, practice-based, and mindfulness-based practices are key parts of a happy and meaningful life where one is serving others for harmony and peace in the family, community, and society at large. They showed, in addition, that practicing mindfulness and making commitments (through Bodhisattva vows), as well as a mindset based upon the well-being of oneself and others have made the community and society more understanding, peaceful, and appreciative.

Three main themes that emerged from the data collected were translated, coded, and analyzed from the transcripts of the semi-structured personal interviews, a focus-group session, and artifacts as presented by the Vietnamese Buddhist monks residing in the United States. The research findings, recommendations, and conclusions were established in the themes that emerged from the study. They are: (a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America and their lived-experiences are dynamic, unique, and positively contribute to society because of their spiritual leadership roles and obligations; (b) their leadership style is characterized as authentically leading by example, basing decisions upon the core values of mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom; and (c) through their practices, their presence, and their contributions to the welfare of others, they bring about peace of mind and happiness for themselves and for others in the society.

Overall, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks have remarkable things to teach everyone and there is resonance in terms of daily practice and leadership. Five notions
about leadership appeared as patterns of meaning and are expressed as “results” in Chapter 4: (a) Leading from the Inside Out, (b) The Notion of Daily Practice, (c) Leading-by-Example, (d) Congruence, and (e) The Notion of Completeness. What is so crucial in this study is that the findings show Vietnamese Buddhist monks as not only manifesting their beliefs, but also living their beliefs. Their beliefs that everyone is a leader in one way or another and that they all have the Buddha nature—a great potential to be awakened and transformed from negativity to positivity. This type of leadership is the seed for happy individuals, families, and organizations as well as a more peaceful and harmonious society. Ultimately, as far as leadership, goals, and others are concerned, this is going to have a dramatic impact on how we lead and work with others to make a difference in organizations in the world and people as well as leadership.

Conclusions

Three research questions were the guiding light for this phenomenological study, as they were designed to understand the essence and nuance of lived-experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks living in the United States:

1. What are the essences of the lived-experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in spiritual leadership roles?
2. How do they describe their ethical and spiritual practices as spiritual leaders?
3. How do Vietnamese Buddhist monks perceive their roles in encouraging a spiritual life for those in leadership roles so they can effectively lead others?

Conclusions emerging from the three research questions are interdependent and “inter-being,” as the philosophy of Buddhism has indicated. In fact, they are consistent
and interrelated while supporting, reinforcing, and enhancing each other. Each of the research questions with the associated conclusions is discussed below.

**Research Question 1: What are the essences of the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in spiritual leadership roles?**

The essence and nuance of lived-experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks are dynamic, unique, and positively contribute to society at large because of their spiritual leadership roles and obligations. First, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks took Bodhisattva vows; they came to the United States of America from different situations, yet they all worked hard to lead with an exemplified life as spiritual leaders.

Vietnamese Buddhist monks have to overcome this hurdle to become authentic and passionate leaders to serve the community and society at large. Their understanding and practice of the Buddhist’s concept of interdependence—the world is interconnected, as well as all life on planet earth—are the foundation for social justice and a more harmonious society. As Buddhist monks, they put meditation practice and Dharma teaching into action. To them, mindfulness practices help leaders cultivate skills of awareness, compassion, sympathy, and caring for themselves, others, and the natural world. Vietnamese Buddhist monks have dedicated their lives for the benefit of others, yet they are humble in their contribution. They have a high spirit of serving others and find their own inner peace by practicing meditation and mindfulness and cultivating compassion, understanding, and peace.

Vietnamese Buddhist monks are not born as leaders, but ultimately, they learn, adapt, and assimilate into their leadership roles. They are truthful to themselves and have a strong commitment—a mindful desire—to serve others through their belief system,
which is the Buddhist doctrine. They take Bodhisattva vows, have interest in serving all sentient beings and making a difference in others and society as well as themselves. Their leadership qualities come from meditative minds, compassionate hearts, and tested wisdom.

Vietnamese Buddhist monks come from varied backgrounds and experience difficulties and challenges that they have to overcome. They experience Dukkha or sufferings and dissatisfaction firsthand, yet they are able to overcome these huddles because of their skill sets and their character points. Over their spiritual journey, they are able to hone their leadership skills to deal with different types of people and environments. They are dynamic and adaptable in their leadership styles. While they are being truthful and contented, they are inspired and motivated by others.

Overall, the core essence of Buddhism for the leaders is to practice their belief. This is because, saying without doing is not enough to lead or convince others to follow or get respected, and, therefore, will not succeed. Vietnamese Buddhist monks are finding practical ways to benefit the larger society and improve the lives of others through their own action and contribution. They provide a new mindscape in leadership, a landscape of inner experience and practice. These ideas, such as the concepts of mindfulness, meditation, and compassion, are applicable. Furthermore, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks are the living proof that compassion and meditation work. They harvest the ability to be in stillness regardless of the surroundings and they make a positive difference for themselves and others.
Research Question 2: How do Vietnamese Buddhist monks describe their ethical and spiritual practices as spiritual leaders?

Vietnamese Buddhist monks describe their ethical and spiritual practices as a challenge; they are the spiritual leaders in their communities. In addition, they are able to serve commendably because of their daily practices. Their practices include, but are not limited to, meditation (sitting and walking), chanting, and being mindful in their daily activities both in their thoughts and in their actions. As Venerable Thich-Dao-Quang noted:

Being a spiritual leader in the 21st century is very challenging because I am expected to know many aspects of life (religions, psychology, counseling, sociology, politics, public relations, etc.) in order to bring a good service to my community. It is also very hard to counsel the community on the balance between spiritual and material life.

However, they are using Sila, or precepts, as guidance. It is an ethical and moral standard they hold. They lead by example and practice as a part of their daily routine. They balance between a spiritual and material life. They practice mindfulness meditation and abide by precepts as the foundation for teaching and transformation. Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership styles are leading by example, engaging with the community and being authentic or truthful to their leadership capacities that are based upon the foundation of mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom attained from their lived-experiences.

What is special about the Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership style is the exercise and implementation of their beliefs. Not only are they demonstrating their own beliefs, they are practicing their own beliefs and values as well as others. The notion of leading by example is embedded in their hearts and minds. They always emphasize that
all transformations must start from within. Vietnamese Buddhist monks come from humble and different backgrounds, yet they have very positive outlooks to make their life and others better. A positive attitude is the driving force for the transformation of an individual’s happiness and the community’s well-being. Their optimism helps them tremendously in their efforts at easing the suffering of others. With their “can-do” mentality and determination through the Bodhisattva’s vows, Vietnamese Buddhist monks enhance the quality of life and world-peace.

Research Question 3: How do Vietnamese Buddhist monks perceive their roles in encouraging a spiritual life for those in leadership roles so they can effectively lead others?

Vietnamese Buddhist monks offer their own practices and insights into meditation, compassion, and wisdom. Their own contentment and happiness are crucial for them to continue to lead and share with others. Their practices of mindfulness meditation enhance not only their personal well-being, but also that of the collective well-being of the whole community. The findings show that their practices, presence, and contributions bring peace of mind and happiness to themselves, others, and, ultimately, to society as a whole. Most of the participants agreed with Venerable Thich-Minh-Thien’s perception in their monastic roles of encouraging others to live a spiritual life so they can effectively lead others:

a) Love thyself more: means practice more on yourself and expand your compassion and loving-kindness to others.
b) Perceive that your own happiness plays a big part in your leadership role. If you’re not happy, your leadership skill will suffer.
c) Success is not accounted by benefits only but together with your own happiness and others.
d) Lead-by-example.
The Vietnamese Buddhist monks believe all transformations start from within, and that their roles are to enable and encourage themselves and others to live their lives happily. They always believe that *a temple built, is a prison less*. The Most Venerable Thich-Tinh-Tu pointed out that Buddhism is not only religious in nature, it is educational, and it is a way of life. Buddhism’s platform is the use of the five precepts to educate all Buddhists along deeper practice in the 10 precepts and many more. It is designed to transform personal shortcomings and unwholesome concepts to completion, to help human morality and transform negative thoughts and actions into positive thoughts and actions.

The leadership styles of Vietnamese Buddhist monks are dynamic and distinctive. The notion of a leader as an educator is crucial because when it comes to education, three other interactive elements such as compassion, wisdom, and ethics come into consideration. These are fundamental to making life in this world better. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership style contains these characteristics in which empowerment and enhancement of others is a requisite. Their leadership style is unique as spiritual leaders. They have a strong foundation and fundamental principles with defined obligations and responsibilities. The networking between Vietnamese Buddhist monks is just like a family structure where they respect and nurture one another. Their minds and hearts are always serving others as well as preserving, protecting, and strengthening their belief, vision, and mission. Vietnamese Buddhist monks have a strong relationship amongst the community leaders and have many inner values such as selflessness, and harmony. They also have a high spirit and moral. Some of these moral values include compassion, diligence, determination, joy, gratitude, love, integrity,
honesty, mindfulness, perseverance, responsibility, trustworthiness, understanding and wisdom.

A conclusion that can be drawn is that the Vietnamese Buddhist monks embrace a spiritual awakening—the awakening from their delusions, thoughts, and actions. To be awakened or transformed, individuals must practice the core values and beliefs. As Venerable Thich Dao-Quang, a licensed psychologist, stated, “If you practice well enough, you can see tremendous change in your life which benefits those around you. Change begins inside yourself.” In addition, the Most Venerable Minh-Dat added, “First you have to see your practice through the scope of Buddha’s teachings. You have to see its benefits, practice the Noble Eightfold Path, be an effective Dharma teacher, and live ethically.” The Most Venerable Thich-Tinh-Tu, a participant in the focus group, agreed and summarized these as “the wisdom accumulated from 58 years of practice.”

Conclusions drawn from this research will enable leaders and others in the general society to understand in-depth Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ lived-experiences, beliefs, practices, and leadership styles by engaging in authentic leadership as well as leading-by-example. The findings reveal a strong, yet simple notion: *It is better to be a human being than a human doing.* What is embedded in the Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership style is their daily practice that has transformed the lives of those in their communities. It is the idea of living inside out; it is the idea of peace. The findings show that this leadership style is based upon wisdom, understanding, practice, peace of mind, harmony, and compassion. All these elements are associated with peaceful existence.
Recommendations

Findings show that the lived-experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks living in the United States of America are unique, diverse, and applicable; in particular, their contributions are significant and expandable. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks' ideas and practices about leadership as well as their transformation for higher purposes, if applied, would help build more harmonious, peaceful, and happier individuals, families, and societies. Recommendations offered here are primarily to assist leaders and practitioners as well as ordinary individuals who want a happy life, a more harmonious and peaceful society. This section also specifies recommendations for further studies.

Recommendations for Leaders, Educators, Stakeholders, and Policymakers

Human beings desire happiness, peace, and harmony to ensure comfortable, balanced lives for themselves, their families, their communities, and ultimately, society itself. The need to understand what leadership means, particularly mindful practices are vital for developing a more harmonious and peaceful life. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ lived-experience, practices, and insights have made this research much more enjoyable, relevant, and valuable. Findings, results, and conclusions from this study are expected to enable anyone from students to teachers, from business leaders to political leaders, and policymakers to adapt, formulate, and practice compassion-based and wisdom-based principles and virtues. Noted here are recommendations for the practice of leadership, ones that can generate both discussion and action.

1. Cultivate, practice, and share Compassion. What keeps society peaceful, orderly, and balanced emotionally and spiritually is the ability of individuals, leaders, and followers to control their own thoughts, speech, and actions in
relation to others. Such is central to cultivating compassion and should be a predominate approach in enlightened leadership.

2. Practice meditation: This practice develops an awareness, which, in turn, creates an attentive and healthy mind. Leaders who are mindful practitioners can engender well-being and happiness in themselves and those they lead.

3. Practice and develop mindfulness: The practice of mindfulness enables leaders and individuals to handle strong emotions such as anger, sadness, and hatred, as well as anxiety, loneliness, and jealousy. In particular, a practice of mindfulness can help individuals reduce the effects of stress on themselves and others. Stress reduction through the practice of mindfulness has positive potential for leaders, those whom they lead, and the contexts of their interactions.

4. Learn and apply Buddhist-based principles and values: Such application can encourage leaders to move to a less ego-centric, positional practice of leadership and toward more harmonious, peaceful, and productive environments. In this sense, consider extensive teaching in Dharma that teaches and brings compassion to leadership as it is practiced in the Western society.

5. Provide adequate integrated mindfulness training: To invest in sustainable-based and wisdom-based practices, organizations and its leadership rank team should provide mindfulness training for leaders and followers. For example, teach and implement mindfulness-based programs in the private and public
institutions as well as in the educational settings, especially K-16, for administrators and teachers, alike.

6. Convert from a learned-based approach to an applied-based approach: Leaders and followers need to emphasize the practice that nourishes the heart, body, and mind. World peace starts with one’s personal peace and transformation. A balanced, happy, and harmonious life absolutely cannot be advanced without true understanding and love for oneself and others.

7. Advocate the physical facilities for mindfulness-based practices: Leaders and policymakers at local and state levels should give favorable conditions in the process of obtaining construction permits and use permits for Meditation Centers, Buddhist Temples, and Mindfulness-based Practice Centers in the United States of America because “These facilities are one of the most beneficial places for people to come to practice and to come to heal their problems.” This alternative and newfound approach of mindfulness-based practices can enhance the quality of life for all.

8. Promote the notion of completeness: Essential to enlightened leadership, the “U theory” moves leaders through a suspension of judgment to enlightened visioning. Expansion of that notion and its practices hold promise, should the model continue into the “O theory,” which is an expression and practice of “completeness.”

**Recommendations for Further Studies**

This researcher suggests and advocates further study of the dimensions emerging from this research with Vietnamese Buddhist monks in the United States.
1. Conduct replication studies in different countries: Doing so may provide further information related to the findings and conclusions of this phenomenological qualitative study. Duplication with Vietnamese Buddhist monks residing in other countries (e.g., Vietnam, Australia Cambodia, Laos, China, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, France, Germany, and other European countries) may reveal additional information about their beliefs, practices, and contributions as leaders.

2. Investigate whether, or how, the Vietnam War impacted the leadership of monks who participated in this particular research and those impacted by that particular armed conflict.

3. Replicate this research with Vietnamese Buddhist nuns: A qualitative investigation of their leadership practices may add to a holistic picture emerging from this research on the leadership practices of the monks. In addition, it may reveal new dimensions of leadership practiced within the realm of Buddhist-based principles.

**Summary**

This chapter underlines and reiterates the purpose of this phenomenological study. Moreover, it explains the process and arrival of its conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further research. In this chapter, the findings show that the Vietnamese Buddhist monks are practicing their beliefs and values in order to obtain a happy life. As a result, they are practicing the art of wholesomeness, which includes: meditation, compassion, loving-kindness, humility, faith, absence of anxiety, diligence, tranquility, vigilance, equanimity, not harming others, absence of hatred and non-violence. They
also practice what the Buddha and their masters teach them, which include abiding by
the 250 precepts they took when they were ordained. Besides, their practices such as
avoiding craving, hatred, arrogance, suspicion, and wrong-viewing enable them to
achieve their inner peace and contentment.

What has emerged from this research expands both the understanding of
enlightened and mindful leadership and its practice. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks'
lived-experiences and ideas for personal and social transformation as well as peace, if
applied, would build better individuals, families and a larger society. Through this
research, they send the message that leaders can develop the practices and habits of
transformative leadership that result in them being harmonious, contented, and happy for
themselves and those they serve. Mindful leadership is generated by the diligent practice
of mindfulness, meditation, contentment, altruism, and appreciation, the nuances, and
essences of which are cultivated virtue, compassion, understanding, and peace.
Figure 9. Summary of Venerable Thich-Thien-Duyen.
1. Lead by committed to Zen practices.
2. Looking inward to learn and practice the short-comings.

1. A 48-year-old Abbot in Bonsall, CA.
2. He is the president of Vietnamese Buddhist Meditation Congregation in America.
3. Well-trained monk in Vietnam under renowned Zen Master Thich-Thanh-Tu

1. Buddha doctrines and the wisdom of great masters and apply Zen in everyday activities.
2. Learning and leading-by-example
3. Benefit oneself and others by the art of balancing material and spiritual life

Biographical information

Leadership Styles and Characteristics

Beliefs

Venerable Thich-Tue-Giac

Lived-Experiences

Practices

1. Abiding to the precepts and practices
2. Sharing the Dharma and the wisdom of Zen master Thich Thanh Tu

1. Meditation and silent retreat
2. Applying and practicing meditation with laypersons.
3. Leading-by-example
4. See others as co-practitioners

Figure 10. Summary of Venerable Thich-Tue-Giac.
Figure 11. Summary of Venerable Thich-Tu-Luc.
Figure 12. Summary of Venerable Thich-Phap-Chon.
Figure 13. Summary of Venerable Thich-Hanh-Tuan.

1. Leading by example
2. Percepts are foundation

1. A 58-year-old Buddhist monk, 2. He earned masters degree and studied PhD program at Berkeley, 3. A Buddhist Scholar

Biographical information

Leadership Styles and Characteristics

Lived-Experiences

Practices

1. Came as a boat person and refugee
2. Assimilating and learning
3. Sharing the Dharma
4. Scholarly contributor of Buddhism

1. Meditation/mindfulness
2. Loving-kindness
3. Leading-by-example
4. See others as friends and teachers

Venerable Thich-Hanh-Tuan

Beliefs

1. Leading by example
2. Life-long learner
Figure 14. Summary of The Most Venerable Thich-Nguyen-Sieu.
Figure 15. Summary of Venerable Thich-Minh-Dung.

- **Biographical information**
  - 1. A 56-year-old Abbot in Pheland, CA.
  - 2. Earned his bachelor and master degrees

- **Leadership Styles and Characteristics**
  - Engaged Buddhism; leading by doing.

- **Beliefs**
  - 1. Peace in oneself, peace in the world
  - 2. The Buddha and his teaching
  - 3. Believe in oneself and others as well the unseen

- **Practices**
  - 1. Meditation/mindfulness
  - 2. Heart and mind are at once and use compassion, not authority, to influence others
  - 3. Lead-by-doing the things you love and beautify surrounding even in a remote area

- **Lived-Experiences**
  - 1. Came as boat person
  - 2. Continuous learner and contributor
  - 3. Keep balance and maintain a peaceful heart and mind in this busy, hectic world
**Figure 16.** Summary of the most Venerable Thich-Thang-Hoan.

1. **Biographical Information**
   - A 86-year-old Abbot in Sacramento, CA.
   - Became a novice monk at age of 8.
   - A well-trained Buddhist monk in Vietnam.

2. **Leadership Roles and Characteristics**
   - Engaging all aspects of lead-by-example; lead-by-right-speech; lead-by-right thought
   - Be with Sangha, which is the collective and power.

3. **Lived-Experiences**
   - Leadership roles throughout his life
   - Sharing the Dharma and passionate in Duy Thuc Hoc
   - Blessing and contributing in the highest leadership roles

4. **Practices**
   - Meditation/mindfulness and loving-kindness
   - Leading-by-example; right speech and right thought.
   - Not to cling on to anything

5. **Beliefs**
   - Visionary and long-term transformation
   - Duy Thuc Hoc/Yogacara
   - Zen and Pure Land
   - Sangha represents collective energy.
Figure 17. Summary of Venerable Thich-Minh-Thien.
Figure 18. Summary of the most Venerable Thich-Thai-Sieu.
Figure 19. Summary of Venerable Thich-Dao-Quang.
Figure 20. Summary of Venerable Thich-Tinh-Man.
Figure 21. Summary of the most Venerable Thich-Tinh-Tu.
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Appendix A: Thich Nhat Hanh’s vision as the Five Mindfulness Trainings

The First Mindfulness Training - Reverence For Life
Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of interbeing and compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, or in my way of life. Seeing that harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, which in turn come from dualistic and discriminative thinking, I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself and in the world.

The Second Mindfulness Training - True Happiness (Generosity)
Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to practicing generosity in my thinking, speaking, and acting. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others; and I will share my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. I will practice looking deeply to see that the happiness and suffering of others are not separate from my own happiness and suffering; that true happiness is not possible without understanding and compassion; and that running after wealth, fame, power and sensual pleasures can bring much suffering and despair. I am aware that happiness depends on my mental attitude and not on external conditions, and that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy. I am committed to practicing Right Livelihood so that I can help reduce the suffering of living beings on Earth and reverse the process of global warming.

The Third Mindfulness Training - True Love (Sexual Responsibility)
Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. Knowing that sexual desire is not love, and that sexual activity motivated by craving always harms myself as well as others, I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without true love and a deep, long-term commitment made known to my family and friends. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct. Seeing that body and mind are one, I am committed to learning appropriate ways to take care of my sexual energy and cultivating loving kindness, compassion, joy and inclusiveness – which are the four basic elements of true love – for my greater happiness and the greater happiness of others. Practicing true love, we know that we will continue beautifully into the future.

The Fourth Mindfulness Training - Loving Speech and Deep Listening
Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering and to promote reconciliation and peace in myself and among other people,
ethnic and religious groups, and nations. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope. When anger is manifesting in me, I am determined not to speak. I will practice mindful breathing and walking in order to recognize and to look deeply into my anger. I know that the roots of anger can be found in my wrong perceptions and lack of understanding of the suffering in myself and in the other person. I will speak and listen in a way that can help myself and the other person to transform suffering and see the way out of difficult situations. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to utter words that can cause division or discord. I will practice Right Diligence to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear that lie deep in my consciousness.

The Fifth Mindfulness Training - Nourishment and Healing (Diet for a mindful society)

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will practice looking deeply into how I consume the Four Kinds of Nutriments, namely edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness. I am determined not to gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs, or any other products which contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, TV programs, films, magazines, books, and conversations. I will practice coming back to the present moment to be in touch with the refreshing, healing and nourishing elements in me and around me, not letting regrets and sorrow drag me back into the past nor letting anxieties, fear, or craving pull me out of the present moment. I am determined not to try to cover up loneliness, anxiety, or other suffering by losing myself in consumption. I will contemplate interbeing and consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well-being in my body and consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family, my society and the Earth.

Appendix B: Email for Potential Participants Who Are Known to the Researcher

Dear Venerable:_________________

Greeting, my name is Phe Bach (a.k.a. Tâm Thượng Đính), as you might recall I am a Vietnamese Buddhist Youth leader and a board member of Kim Quang Buddhist Temple, where we had the honor and compassion to work with others for many years. Currently, I am a doctoral student at Drexel University and beginning research in ‘mindful’ leadership and spiritual leadership. My dissertation study is entitled: “Mindful Leadership - A Phenomenological Study of Vietnamese Buddhist Monks in America with Respect to their Spiritual Leadership Roles and Contributions to Society.” I am conducting a phenomenological research on the lived-experience of Vietnamese Buddhist monks and how they contribute positively to the greater good of our society.

I am looking for about 10-15 Vietnamese Buddhist monks, who are currently abbots at a temple for my study. The interview will last about one to two hours, please response to my request at tamthuongdinh@gmail.com or via cellular phone at 916-607-4066 so that I will further set up the time and place for the interview at your convenience. It can also be an interview via Skype or FaceTime.

Shall you have any concerns or questions regarding my research, please contact me directly or my supervisor, Dr. W. Edward Bureau, Ph.D. at (215) – 847-xxxx.

Your support and consideration are greatly appreciated.

Respectfully yours
Phe Bach
Doctoral Candidate
Drexel University
Appendix C: Consent Form

Drexel University
Consent to Take Part
In a Research Study

1. Title of research study: Mindful Leadership - A Phenomenological Study of Vietnamese Buddhist Monks in America with Respect to their Spiritual Leadership Roles and Contributions to Society

2. Researcher: Phe Bach

3. Why you are being invited to take part in a research study
   We invite you to take part in a research study because you are a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and an Abbot.

4. What you should know about a research study
   • Someone will explain this research study to you.
   • Whether or not you take part is up to you.
   • You can choose not to take part.
   • You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
   • Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.
   • Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

5. Who can I talk to?
   If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team: Phe Bach at phe.bach@drexel.edu or Dr. W. Edward Bureau, web28@drexel.edu
   This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board. You may talk to them at (215) 255-7857 or email HRPP@drexel.edu for any of the following:
   • Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
   • You cannot reach the research team.
   • You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
   • You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
   • You want to get information or provide input about this research.

6. Why are we doing this research?
   The purpose of this phenomenological research is to understand how spiritual leadership practices of Vietnamese Buddhist monks might/may be models of moral and ethical leadership for others in the larger society. It is intended to explore the phenomenon of the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in their spiritual and leadership positions. The study is also designed to identify how, through the essence
of these experiences, Buddhist spiritual values and practices may be woven into daily lives of others in the greater society.

7. How long will the research last?
   Study participants will only participate in a single semi-structured interview that will last up to two hours. Some selected monks in California will participate in one focus group, which lasts about 50 minutes.

8. How many people will be studied?
   Fifteen people will be in this research study, approximately ten in the individual interviews and the balance in the focus group. Those in a focus group will be aware that they are by invitation and by the existence of other participants.

9. What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?
   You will answer a list of questions in the semi-structure interview format. Additionally, you may choose to volunteer to participate in a 50-minute focus group interview on a later date.
   The interviews will be audio recorded and whenever possible the video will be recorded too.
   Face-to-face interviews to be conducted in a private room at the Kim Quang Buddhist Temple in Sacramento, California. Participants identified in the snowball sampling will interviewed via Skype. Participants will only participate in a single semi-structured interview that last up to two hours. Some selected monks in California will participate in one focus group, which lasts about 50 minutes, and will be conducted at a gathering site for monks in Sacramento, California.

10. What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?
    N/A

11. What happens if I do not want to be in this research?
    You may decide not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you.

12. What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?
    You can agree to take part in the research now and stop at any time, it will not be held against you. There are no adverse consequences to withdrawing from the research.

13. Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?
    No known risk is associated with this study.

14. Do I have to pay for anything while I am on this study?
    There is no cost to you for participating in this study.

15. Will being in this study help me in any way?
    No benefits are associated with participating in this study.
16. **What happens to the information we collect?**

Efforts will be made to limit your personal information, including research study and medical records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this organization.

17. **Can I be removed from the research without my OK?**

N/A

18. **What else do I need to know?**

This research study is being done by Drexel University.
Appendix D: Interview Protocol


Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interview Participant:

Interview Questions (asked in open ended format)

1. When did you come to America or how long have you been living in America?
2. How long have you been practicing mindfulness or meditating?
3. Please provide a brief history of your temple and your involvement with this temple and your background
4. When did you become an abbot for this temple? What is your current role?
5. What are your belief system and your leadership models?
6. Please describe your Buddhist theories, values, and practice that helped you in your leadership role. Please elaborate on how these three things have helped you lead the congregation.
8. On average, how many times per week do you meditate/Chanting or conduct mindful practice? And for how long?
9. What are the three characteristics that describe your leadership style?
10. What are the core practices at your temple?
11. What are your thoughts and feelings about being a spiritual leader?
12. How is your experience as a Buddhist monk the same or different in Vietnam and in America?
13. What are the ethical tenets of Buddhism guide your role as a spiritual leader? Please describe how your practices and beliefs intersect with your leadership styles and influences and how do you bring them into your roles as leader?
14. Please describe how your Buddhist spiritual values and practices could be integrated into leadership theories.
15. How do your practices and belief helping you in molding your leadership styles and influences?
   a. What roles does mindfulness play in your decision-making?
16. How do Buddhist spiritual values and practices can be integrated into leadership theories?
   a. What are the values?
   b. What are the practices?
   c. What are well-accepted leadership theories?
17. How do you describe your ethical and spiritual practices as a spiritual leader?
18. How do you perceive your roles in encouraging a spiritual life and/or in a leadership role?
19. Any other comments that you would like to include in this interview
Appendix E: Focus Group Protocol

Time of Focus Group:
Date: 
Place: 
Interviewer: Phe Bach
Focus Group Participants:

1. Please describe your background
2. How do you become a monk? At what age? What is your training process?
3. When did you become an abbot for this temple? What is your current role?
4. What is your belief system?
5. What are your leadership models?
6. Do you think you are an effective leader? Why or why not?
7. Please describe your Buddhist theories, values, and practice that helped you in your leadership role. Please elaborate on how these three things have helped you lead the congregation.
9. On average, how many times per week do you meditate/Chanting or conduct mindful practice? And for how long?
10. What are three characteristics that describe you?
11. What are the three characteristics that describe your leadership style?
12. What are the core practices at your temple?
13. Is there anything that you would like to include in this interview?
14. What are the ethical tenets of Buddhism guide your role as a spiritual leader?
15. How do you bring them into your roles as leader?
16. Please describe how your practices and beliefs intersect with your leadership styles and influences.
17. Please describe how your Buddhist spiritual values and practices could be integrated into leadership theories.
18. How do your practices and belief helping you in molding your leadership styles and influences?
   a. What roles does mindfulness play in their decision-making?

19. How do Buddhist spiritual values and practices can be integrated into leadership theories?
   a. What are the values?
   b. What are the practices?
   c. What are well-accepted leadership theories?
20. How do you describe your ethical and spiritual practices as spiritual leaders?
21. How do you perceive your roles in encouraging a spiritual life and/or in a leadership role?
Appendix F: Approval of Protocol

APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

August 12, 2013
W. Edward Bureau, Ph.D.
School of Education
Mailstop: Drexel

Dear Dr. Bureau,

On August 12, 2013 the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review:</th>
<th>Initial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>A Phenomenological Study of Vietnamese Buddhist Monks in America with Respect to their Spiritual Leadership Roles and Contributions to Society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investigator:</th>
<th>W. Edward Bureau, Ph.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IRB ID:</td>
<td>130702182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding:</td>
<td>Internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Title:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant ID:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IND, IDE or HDE:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents Reviewed:</td>
<td>Application Form, Contact Forms, Conflict of Interest Forms, Template Protocol, Data Collection Tools, Recruitment Materials, and Proposal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to 45 CFR 46.110, this study is Approved Expedited Categories 6 and 7. This study will enroll 15(10 interviews and 5 focus group) Vietnamese Buddhist Monks who are abbots recruited from the general public to complete interviews, and focus groups.

The IRB approved the protocol from August 12, 2013 to August 11, 2014 inclusive. Before August 11, 2014, which is 45 days prior to study closure, you are to submit a completed "FORM: Continuing Review Progress Report (HRP-212)" and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of August 11, 2014 approval of this protocol expires on that date.
Attached are stamped approved consent documents. Use copies of these documents to document consent.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL [HRP-103].

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Daryelle S. Gibson
Member, Social and Behavioral IRB #3
Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study

DREXEL UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

1. Title Of Research Study: Mindful Leadership - A Phenomenological Study of Vietnamese Buddhist Monks in America with Respect to their Spiritual Leadership Roles and Contributions to Society.

2. Researchers: W. Edward Bureau, Ph.D. and Phe Bach

3. Why You Are Being Invited To Take Part In A Research Study
We invite you to take part in a research study because you are a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and an Abbot.

4. What You Should Know About A Research Study
   - Someone will explain this research study to you.
   - Whether or not you take part is up to you.
   - You can choose not to take part.
   - You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
   - Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.
   - Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

5. Who Can I Talk To?
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team: Phe Bach at phe.bach@drexel.edu or W. Edward Bureau, web28@drexel.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board. You may talk to them at (215) 255-7857 or email HRPP@drexel.edu for any of the following:
   - Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
   - You cannot reach the research team.
   - You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
   - You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
   - You want to get information or provide input about this research.

6. Why Are We Doing This Research?
The purpose of this research study is to understand how spiritual leadership practices of Vietnamese Buddhist monks might/may be models of moral and ethical leadership for others in the larger society. It is intended to explore the phenomenon of the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in their spiritual and leadership positions.

APPROVED
Human Research Protection
Protocol # 1307002162
Approval Date: 06/11/13
Expiation Date: 08/11/14
ICF version August 2014
Subject Initials:
Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study

The study is also designed to identify how, through the essence of these experiences, Buddhist spiritual values and practices may be woven into daily lives of others in the greater society.

7. How Long Will the Research Last?
Study participants will only participate in a single semi-structured interview that last up to two hours. Some selected monks in California will participate in one focus group, which lasts about 50 minutes.

8. How Many People Will Be Studied?
Fifteen (15) people will be in this research study, approximately ten (10) individual interviews and the balance in the focus group. Those in a focus group will be aware that they are by invitation and by the existence of other participants.

9. What Happens If I Say Yes, I Want To Be In This Research?
You will answer a list of questions in the semi-structure interview format. Additionally, you may choose to volunteer to participate in a 50-minute focus group interview on a later date.

- The interviews will be audio recorded and whenever possible the video will be recorded too.
- Face-to-face interviews will be conducted in a private room at the Kim Quang Buddhist Temple in Sacramento, California.

Participants identified in the snowball sampling will be interviewed via Skype. Participants will only participate in a single semi-structured interview that last up to two hours. Some selected monks in California will participate in one focus group, which lasts about 50 minutes, and will be conducted at a gathering site for monks in Sacramento, California.

10. What Happens If I Do Not Want To Be In This Research?
You may decide not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you.

11. What Happens If I Say Yes, But I Change My Mind Later?
You can agree to take part in the research now and stop at any time, it will not be held against you. There are no adverse consequences to withdrawing from the research.

12. Is There Any Way Being In This Study Could Be Bad For Me?
There are currently no known risk is associated with this study.

13. Do I Have to pay for anything while I am on this study?
There is no cost to you for participating in this study.
Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study

14. Will being in this study help me anyway? There may be no direct benefits associated with participating in this study.

15. What happens to the information we collect? Efforts will be made to limit your personal information, including research study and medical records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this organization.

16. What else do I need to know? This research study is being done by Drexel University.

Signature Block for Capable Adult
Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM AFTER THIS DATE → August 11, 2014

Signature of subject ____________________________ Date _____________

Printed name of subject ____________________________

Signature of person obtaining consent ____________________________ Date _____________

Printed name of person obtaining consent ____________________________ Form Date _____________

APPROVED
Human Research Protection
Protocol # 1307000162
Approval Date: 08/10/13
Expiration Date: 08/11/14

ICF version August 2014 Subject Initials: ____________________________
Thich Nhat Hanh’s vision as the Five Mindfulness Trainings

The First Mindfulness Training - Reverence For Life
Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of interbeing and compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, or in my way of life. Seeing that harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, which in turn come from dualistic and discriminative thinking, I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself and in the world.

The Second Mindfulness Training - True Happiness (Generosity)
Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to practicing generosity in my thinking, speaking, and acting. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others; and I will share my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. I will practice looking deeply to see that the happiness and suffering of others are not separate from my own happiness and suffering; that true happiness is not possible without understanding and compassion; and that running after wealth, fame, power and sensual pleasures can bring much suffering and despair. I am aware that happiness depends on my mental attitude and not on external conditions, and that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy. I am committed to practicing Right Livelihood so that I can help reduce the suffering of living beings on Earth and reverse the process of global warming.

The Third Mindfulness Training - True Love (Sexual Responsibility)
Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. Knowing that sexual desire is not love, and that sexual activity motivated by craving always harms myself as well as others, I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without true love and a deep, long-term commitment made known to my family and friends. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct. Seeing that body and mind are one, I am committed to learning appropriate ways to take care of my sexual energy and cultivating loving kindness, compassion, joy and inclusiveness – which are the four basic elements of true love – for my greater happiness and the greater happiness of others. Practicing true love, we know that we will continue beautifully into the future.

The Fourth Mindfulness Training - Loving Speech and Deep Listening
Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering and to promote reconciliation and peace in myself and among other people, ethnic and religious groups, and nations. Knowing that words can create happiness or
suffering, I am committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope. When anger is manifesting in me, I am determined not to speak. I will practice mindful breathing and walking in order to recognize and to look deeply into my anger. I know that the roots of anger can be found in my wrong perceptions and lack of understanding of the suffering in myself and in the other person. I will speak and listen in a way that can help myself and the other person to transform suffering and see the way out of difficult situations. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to utter words that can cause division or discord. I will practice Right Diligence to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear that lie deep in my consciousness.

The Fifth Mindfulness Training: Nourishment and Healing (Diet for a mindful society)
Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will practice looking deeply into how I consume the Four Kinds of Nutriments, namely edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness. I am determined not to gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs, or any other products which contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, TV programs, films, magazines, books, and conversations. I will practice coming back to the present moment to be in touch with the refreshing, healing and nourishing elements in me and around me, not letting regrets and sorrow drag me back into the past nor letting anxieties, fear, or craving pull me out of the present moment. I am determined not to try to cover up loneliness, anxiety, or other suffering by losing myself in consumption. I will contemplate interbeing and consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well-being in my body and consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family, my society and the Earth.