



Non-Standard Buddhisms in Modern Vietnam: Reaffirming Traditions or Creating New Religions?

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Many Vietnamese explain the catastrophic history of their nation in the twentieth century as the repaying of an overbearing karmic debt. This buddhistic macrohistory is also used to explain the rise of a number of religious movements in the first half of the century that seem to walk a very fine line between being independent religious groups and re-invigorations of orthodox Buddhist ideas at a time when "orthodox" Buddhism in Vietnam floundered. In this paper I will provide an examination of how the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai movements appropriate Buddhist traditions as part of a modernizing agenda, and note how, in the development of their groups, they come to seem increasingly Buddhist despite claiming to be independent and "modern." Finally, I shall examine what this mediation between the traditional and the modern contributes to the development of the history of Buddhism in Vietnam and, to an extent, the wider implications of comprehending Buddhism's contribution to East Asia thinking and practice in during the twentieth century.