

Propagating the Dharma to millennials through YouTube

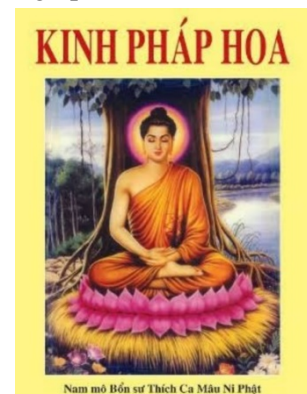
I consider myself to be one of the extremely lucky ones to study the Dharma at the Phap Bao temple every Sunday with a wise, caring and compassionate teacher like Ven. Bhikkuni Giac Anh. The classes are like an endless supply of cool and pure water from a gentle stream that my Dharma friends and I can always drink from to quench our thirst and purify our body and mind. Over the years, I have seen incremental improvements in myself such as being calmer, learning and practicing the Dharma better and applying the practical advice from my Teacher to better deal with everyday challenges.



However, in today's modern society in a Western country with too many attractions and influences, I know not everyone has the right conditions like me to want to and be able to come to the temple to learn the Dharma like me every week. When I go to the temple, I see that the percentage of millennials (those born between the 1980s and 2000) is very low! It could be due to many different reasons like studying, working, or looking after family or kids. Additionally, there are many things that could occupy their minds, like shopping

online, social media on their smart phones, playing online games or getting updates on the latest gadgets etc.

Today, we live in the Degenerate Age, which is a period that marks the decline in the Dharma, as stated in the Lotus Sutra. Like many Sangha members and Buddhists, I share the same concern about this decline, especially in Western countries and especially among the younger generations. Even though in Australia, the percentage of people following Buddhism has increased to 79.1% from 1996-2001; however, sociologists predict that by 2060 Buddhists globally will decrease from about 7% to roughly 5% because of the low birth-rate amongst female Buddhists (Pew Research Centre)!



According to a survey conducted by Google in 2015, they found that "people don't go online anymore; they live online". According to the Digital Australia 2017 edition, people are spending an average of 7 hours each day on tablets, phones and computers. With the above stats, it could seem like more people are living in a virtual reality and are disconnected from the present moment; however, I think the Internet could present some great opportunities. I often think about how we can utilise the power of the Internet, especially YouTube, to bring the Dharma closer to people...



I believe the time has come for each one of us, Sangha members and Lay Buddhists, to more actively propagate the Dharma on the Internet. I am referring to utilising a powerful platform popularly known as **YouTube**. I remember someone said to me that “to really help people, we must meet them where they are”. I believe this is in line with the Buddha’s teachings.

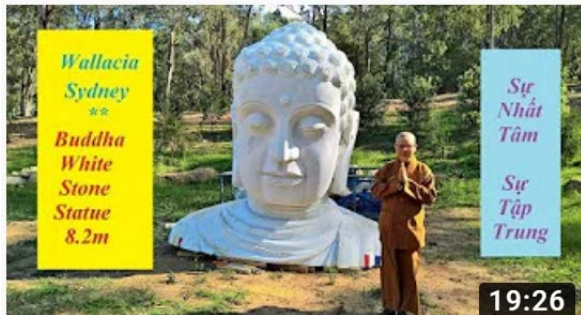
Did you know that YouTube is an American video-sharing platform established in February 2005 that is the second most visited website in the world? It has 1.3 billion users with over 30 million visitors per day! My proposal of using YouTube to propagate the Dharma is not a new concept, as there are many Dharma teachers who are already using this medium successfully to reach Lay Buddhists and non-Buddhists across the world. Some examples are Senior Ven. Thich Thien Thuan from Vietnam, Senior Ven. Thich Phap Hoa from Canada and Venerable Thich Tam Tien from America on his channel called **Be The Change**.



In Australia, a popular YouTube channel I know of is the **Buddhist Society of Western Australia** by Ajahn Brahmavamso. However, I believe the number of YouTube Dharma channels in Australia is still quite low, especially amongst Vietnamese Buddhists. I see so much potential for the Sangha members and Lay Buddhists to better harness the power of technology to bring the Dharma to more people online via YouTube. This is one way to help people like young Buddhists who are unable to come to the temple to either learn the Dharma, get updates on events or projects at the temple or create an opportunity for them to practice compassion through making donations.



Fortunately, some members in the Vietnamese Sangha community are already harnessing the power of YouTube in their Dharma propagation work. One of those members is my Dharma Teacher who is also the Vice-Abbess of the Phap Bao Monastery, Venerable Bhikkuni Giac Anh. She started the **Dharma Around Us** YouTube channel in December 2018 with the support of some of her younger students. Despite her very busy schedule, she has made the time to share with her students and viewers her Dharma knowledge and discuss important Buddhism topics such as those relating to life and death, interesting Dharma lessons extracted from her observations about nature and more recently, providing updates on the sacred Shakyamuni Buddha Statue project, which has now successfully completed. More specifically, her video on the topic of having laser focus attention in managing the Shakyamuni Buddha Statue project attracted more than 23,000 views in 11 months!



This illustrates the power of YouTube videos. Her Dharma talks have allowed not only her former and current students but people around the world to watch and learn in their own time without having to physically be at the temple. As an example, my young cousin in Vietnam listened to her Dharma talks and have been very moved and inspired by her teachings. I hope Dharma Around Us, as it develops, will speak to the millennials more by

having more English-speaking talks or at least English subtitles and we will see more young people participate on the channel to be the inspiration for other young people.



Quang Duc Productions

225 subscribers

SUBSCRIBED



Another great example of someone in the Sangha community that I know who understands the power of the media is Senior Venerable Thich Nguyen Tang, Abbot of the Quang Duc Monastery in Melbourne and the Webmaster of QuangDuc.com. He and his students recently launched the **Quang Duc Productions** YouTube channel where they have uploaded almost 200 Dharma Talks in Vietnamese by various Venerables in the Unified Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation of Australia-New Zealand from previous retreats.



These videos allow not only attendees to review what they learnt from the Dharma Talks, but for those in Australia and overseas who could not attend the retreats. I believe this is a great step forward for the Congregation in achieving its goals of propagating the Dharma to more and more people. As they evolve, I hope there will be Dharma Talks in English, in shorter and more succinct clips with more lively examples and images, catered for the younger generation so they, too, can benefit from the teachings.

As a Buddhist from the millennial generation, I see the work of propagating the Dharma as a common duty for Sangha members as well as Lay Buddhists. Buddhism has helped improve the lives of my family and myself so I want to help bring the Dharma to Buddhists and non-Buddhists so more and more people can live a happier life. In following the footsteps of my teacher, I started a **Calm Lotus Joyce** YouTube channel in April, 2019 to spread positivity and happiness. However, this channel is in English (and in some cases will also have Vietnamese subtitles) and aims to inspire others to live a happier life, to be kinder and to follow their dreams. Most of my videos are in less than 10 minutes. I also share about Buddhist events and international conferences I have attended and



my key takeaways. This is a way I try to pique the interests of millennials about Buddhism, so they can themselves return to the temple or want to learn more about Buddhism. Senior Venerable Thich Nguyen Tang kindly shared my 7-minute Ullambana Festival video on QuangDuc.com (English section), which attracted more than 3,300 views in only 3 months! This has been a great encouragement for me to keep creating similar videos.



I recognise that the low number of YouTube videos by the Vietnamese Buddhist community is legitimately due to several reasons such as time, human resources, language barriers and technical skills, but I believe one of the key reasons is a fear of judgement by others. A conversation with Ven. Bhikkuni Giac An about some thoughts that were going through her mind before launching the channel helped me to understand that she was as afraid or concerned about what people would think. However, she has been able to overcome this fear by reminding herself the reason she uploaded the videos on YouTube; which is to benefit her current and former students and everyone else on their Dharma path.

In my case, I had been stalling my YouTube channel creation for a while. A part of me did fear judgement, but I was more fearful of the unknown process and how much energy and time it required. However, testing it out with one video, taking one step at a time, accepting that it won't be 'perfect', and trusting in my own abilities that I would be able to learn along the way were helpful for me. It was helped by the fact that I was sick for 7 days, which taught me about impermanence and helped me to immediately spring into action after I recovered.



In summary, YouTube videos are very powerful and I believe Sangha members should join hands with Lay Buddhists to harness it to propagate and protect the Dharma. This is not the only way, but it's definitely a very powerful way to pique people's interest about the Dharma or remind them to return to the temple and take refuge in the Triple Gem. We don't have to be the ones creating the videos, but

we can start sharing the Dharma videos we resonate with more, which allows the Buddha Dharma to be spread across the globe and impact lives more positively. May the Triple Gem bless all Buddha-Dharma related YouTube channels to prosper and continue to benefit all sentient beings.

If you are keen to learn how to use video to propagate the Dharma, I'm no expert, but feel to contact me for some tips on how I started my channel. Together, let's make a difference. Let's touch lives through the power of the Dharma via videos on YouTube so Buddhism can spread far and wide and continue to exist for thousands of years to come.

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