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tri quang (precede)

April 8, 1966

(As the government and military junta of Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky grows weaker, with ~~with~~ rural portions of his country half-conquered by Viet Co Communist Vietna Cong military units, and his ~~sub~~ ^{northern} urban centers in rebellions and violence, one of the emerging strongmen of the country is aye crafty Buddhist monk named Thich Tri Quang.

Thich Tri Quang--the name means "Spiritual Enlightenment"--~~is one--but only one--of the priests heading~~ ^{Now} aye powerful Buddhist religious-political machine, that is now attempting to ~~weak~~ weaken, if not to topple, the Ky government.

The 43-year-old Buddhist monk is often called the Markarios of Vietnam; but Vietnamese sources consider him to be the grise eminence which any future government that should emerge.

"Tri Quang will never sit in the Prime Minister's Office," one Vietnamese explained. "But, if he survives, he'll always be the kingmaker--and the king begin the king."

In Saigon, the most controversial question is: What are Tri Quang's relationship with the Viet Cong Communists, who are now fighting American combat units. This is his biography:)

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THE AIR-CONDITIONED MONK

SAIGON--For 64 days in 1963, a frail, elfish-looking Buddhist monk in dark saffron robe hibernated in the third-floor air-conditioned conference room of the American Embassy.

During the 64 days of his political asylum, khaki-clad American Marine Guards lent him ^a radio, books, writing paper--and made certain he received three vegetarian meals a day prepared by an expert Chinese chef.

The American Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, then on his first tour here, granted political asylum to the (His The Saigon Regime RAIDED Buddhist PAGODAS) enigmatic monk, and in return, Tri Quang wrote political thesis for the American Embassy, which baffled and confused the political officers even more, as to his political views.

When Henry Cabot Lodge returned to Vietnam on his second tour here in June, last year, Thich Tri Quang reportedly retorted: "Of course, I appreciate that Mr. Lodge granting me asylum in the American Embassy.

But, he added arrogantly, "I don't feel it's necessary to meet Mr. Lodge any more."

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Tri Quang's ^{TART} ~~test~~ statement about the second appointment of Lodge Ambassador swept Saigon, much to the delight of his Vietnamese followers. But one Western diplomat explained glumly, "The Americans presume that gratitude is more than an Occidental quality. It doesn't exist in the Orient—and they should not expect it."

On November 4th, 1963, when Tri Quang left the Embassy the major—if not the sole—American influence he ^{carried away} ~~took from the Embassy~~ was a yen for air-conditioning. He installed a unit in his small room at his creme-colored, curve-roofed Buddhist Institute "so he can work better," his associated ^{S EXPLAINED} ~~says~~.

He certainly has been.

Now, two and a half year later; Thich (Reverend) Tri Quang is openly labelled a Communist. Police sources say that he has in the past met members of the National Liberation Front for South Viet Nam, the political ^{BACKBONE} ~~arm~~ of the Viet Cong guerrillas.

Even in 1963—as the politico-priest directed the celebrated Buddhist crisis in ^{WHICH} ~~which~~ seven Buddhist clergy burned themselves alive—a handful of Western officials in Saigon said he was a Communist "from the top of his shaven-head to the bottom of his tippy, tippy toes." But they were hooted down in the cries that later sparked the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem and his family.

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Then, in 1964, after Thich Tri Quang directed his "demi-coup" of student demonstrators ^{toppling} ~~who toppled~~ Premier General Nguyen Khanh from ~~the Presidency~~ office—an increasing number of Saigonese, including fervent Buddhist believers, accused the graceful monk of being a Communist cadre. Some of highest ranking officers—themselves Buddhist—who overthrew the Diem regime in 1963, now accuse the little monk of being a Communist.

Others say that while he himself may not be a Communist, his politics and tactics are openly aiding the Communists in subverting the country. A declaration known to be written by him, makes the important but subtle point that Buddhism in South Vietnam is not only against Communist ^m but also against those that "exploit" the file against Communist ^m these "exploiters" are clearly labelled as Catholic and American ^z the statement also implies the ^{first} ~~1st~~ enemy is Catholic, ^{And} American ⁵ ~~5~~ The Second Enemy is The and then Communist. ⁵ ~~5~~

"It's stupid to ask if Tri Quang is a Communist or not," one ^{once} irate Vietnamese government official exploded. "You can look and look for a Communist Party card on him, but you will never, never find it. But his policy is to make the government so weak it can not fight the Communists—and this is the policy of the Communists.

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The little monk radiates a magnetic spell over those who have met and talked with him .

"I've met Ho Chi Minh," one former Communist explained.

"I've met Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap (head of North Vietnamese Army who defeated French). But I think Tri Quang is tougher than both."

One official, after a long conversation, said: "His face is pale—without blood—you might say cold-blooded. Even before I had spoken a sentence, I felt he already knew what I would say.

"He's very logical and talks better than a Communist cadre. He mixes his language with Communist and Buddhist terminology."

One official who met him explained, "Tri Quang was born a prince—he was born to have authority—he was born to give orders."

Instead of being born a prince, however, Tri Quang was born of middle class landowners, in the province of Ha Tinh, one of the poorest provinces in the country and near the birthplace of such revolutionaries as Ho Chi Minh and Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap.

He was born shortly after 1920 and named Pham Van Bong, but was later to adopt a number of aliases. His father became a Buddhist priest late in life; his mother died a natural death shortly after the Communist take over in 1945. ~~His aunt, after the loss of all family~~

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His aunt, after the loss of all family properties during the Communist revolution, reportedly set fire to the family house and leaped into the flames to commit suicide. Almost twenty years later, Saigonese recalled this incident and noted a striking parallel to Tri Quang's tactics of having Buddhist clergy burn themselves alive in protest against Diem regime.

One of Tri Quang's elder brothers is ^{REPORTEDLY} an important political cadre in Communist North Vietnam, ^{REPORTEDLY} ~~reportedly~~.

When he was 13, Tri Quang reportedly studied for the Buddhist priesthood in the Tu Dam pagoda, still his headquarters, in the old imperial capital of Hue, 400 miles north of Saigon, the stronghold of Buddhism in South Viet Nam.

Ten years later, in August, 1945, after the Viet Minh guerrillas seized power from the Japanese, Tri Quang went to Hanoi, where, he later reportedly told a friend, "I studied ^dMarxism." At the outbreak of the French Indo-China War against the French, he fled to a Communist stronghold where he made two close friends, Hoang Trong Ba and Nguyen Dang, both of whom would be important several decades later.

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In 1963, at the time of the about May 8 incident in Hue, which touched off the Buddhist crisis, Ba was the closest advisor to Diem's brother in Hue, ^DDang as chief of province, reportedly ordered government troops to fire on Buddhist demonstrators in front of ^{the} radio station on Buddha's birthday. The May 8th incident touched off the flaming crisis that later toppled Diem in November.

The twenty-year-old friendship between Tri Quang, Ba and Dang and the presence of all three in Hue at the start of the Buddhist affair has led some sources to believe that there was a plot between them to provoke intentionally the radio station incident in which eight Buddhists were killed.

During the Indo-China War, Tri Quang was arrested by French authorities and held for several months, but upon release he again returned to Ta Dam pagoda in Hue as a full-fledged Buddhist priest.

Reliable sources say in early 1951, he again travelled towards Hanoi, staying a few months in the village of Dien Ho, known as a meeting place for Communist Viet Minh cadres on their way to infiltrate into the French-held areas of the country. Reportedly, he stayed in the village several months and received some training and instructions from the Communist Viet Minh guerrillas before proceeding to Hanoi.

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In early 1952, Tri Quang was reportedly invited to be a delegate to an international Buddhist conference; but the French "Surete" refused him an exit permit on the grounds he was believed to be a Communist. He had previously been arrested by French authority. *see*

Later the Hanoi Central Committee of the Buddhist Association sent Thich Tri Do to have to open the first class of High Studies of Buddhism at the Pagoda. *in Hanoi* Today Thich Tri Do is one of the most important Buddhist clerics in Hanoi.

There were six students in which Tri Do's 1st class. One was Tri Quang. Another was Thich Thien Minh, now Tri Quang's "executive officer" and chief lieutenant for student activities. Another instructor was Le Dinh Tham, then a medical doctor and now chairman of the Buddhist Association in Hanoi.

In 1958, Tri Quang was a member of the Vietnamese Buddhist Association to attend the International Conference of World Buddhism in Phnom Penh. *CAMBODIA* The head of the North Vietnamese delegation was Tri Quang's old professor, Thich Tri Do.

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Tri Quang admitted to a relative of Diem's that he had been a Communist, but had "since changed his ways." But in 1963 during the celebrated Buddhist crisis, neither Diem nor his younger intellectual brother Nhu believed him, and Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu ^{STARTLED} started the world by calling him a ^{"RED in"} ~~yellow~~ yellow robes."