

# Home is Where the Dharma is

BUDDHIST MONK SEES FEW CHANGES IN  
DAILY ROUTINE AFTER MAKING THE MOVE  
FROM CENTRAL VIETNAM TO VENTURA

Story and Photography  
by  
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A view of the An Lac Mission.



**T**ruc Hien, or Thay Chuc Hien in his native language of Vietnamese, was born and raised in Central Vietnam. Truc Hien and his six brothers and sisters were all raised in the Buddhist religion, however he was the only one of them to take the leap from being an active Buddhist to living the life of a Buddhist Monk.

Truc Hien received an excellent education while living in Central Vietnam and he immediately began putting it to a good use. When he finished his schooling late in his teens he soon began teaching Classical Chinese, or as some have come to refer to it as Literary Chinese due to the fact that it is a traditional style of written Chinese that is no longer used in its oral form.

He excelled exceptionally well in the character based written language and set forth to share the ancient art with others. By the time he reached the age of twenty it became clear to him that his calling was to



Hien leading a sermon in Vietnamese at the An Lac Mission.

spend the rest of his days learning about and sharing with others more than just Classical Chinese; he was to become a Buddhist Monk.

The next 16 years of Truc Hien's life were spent in a monastery right there in Central Vietnam where he followed the teachings of the

Buddha while mimicking the elder masters around him.

Then, just a couple of months ago the Buddhist Congress extended an invitation for him to visit and possibly remain in the An Lac Vien Mission and Buddhist Study Center in Ventura, Calif. A close friend of his, Su Co Tue Duc, with whom he had lived with for several years in the monastery in Central Vietnam had already made the transfer out to the An Lac Mission, which played as a motivating factor in his deciding to accept the offer.

Having never traveled to the United States before, Truc Hien, though excited about the opportunity, was also very nervous about taking the trip. He arrived on the morning of Jan. 28th, 2007, which meant that he made it to town just in time for the Vietnamese New Year's Festival that took place in the Performing Arts and Convention Center in Oxnard.

Practicing Buddhists sit and listen to Hien's sermon at the An Lac Mission.



This was the 7th annual New Year's Festival to be hosted by the master, monks and nuns of the An Lac Mission. Considering the fact that his first day in the States was spent surrounded by fellow Vietnamese immigrants and descendants all of whom were speaking in his native tongue it made for a convenient icebreaker in terms of adjusting to his unfamiliar surroundings.

Since Truc Hien moved into the An Lac Mission he's had to make some adjustments in his life due to cultural constraints, such as beginning to learn the English language. However, for the most part surprisingly enough, his daily routine and rituals have remained unchanged. He still meditates, chants, and studies the teachings of the Buddha. He's even cooking and eating the same exact foods that he was accustomed to back in Vietnam.

Seeing as how the An Lac Mission is based around Vietnamese Buddhism practically everyone in the mission primarily uses Vietnamese to communicate with one another; so although it will be very beneficial for him to familiarize himself with the English language as much as he can, it isn't as if he's void of communicating all together until he masters English.

The lifestyle of a Buddhist monk or nun depends far less on where their mission or monastery

resides than one might think. Truc Hien has dealt with a mild extent of culture shock since his transfer to the States if for no other reason than the fact that practically all of his time is spent within the mission itself.

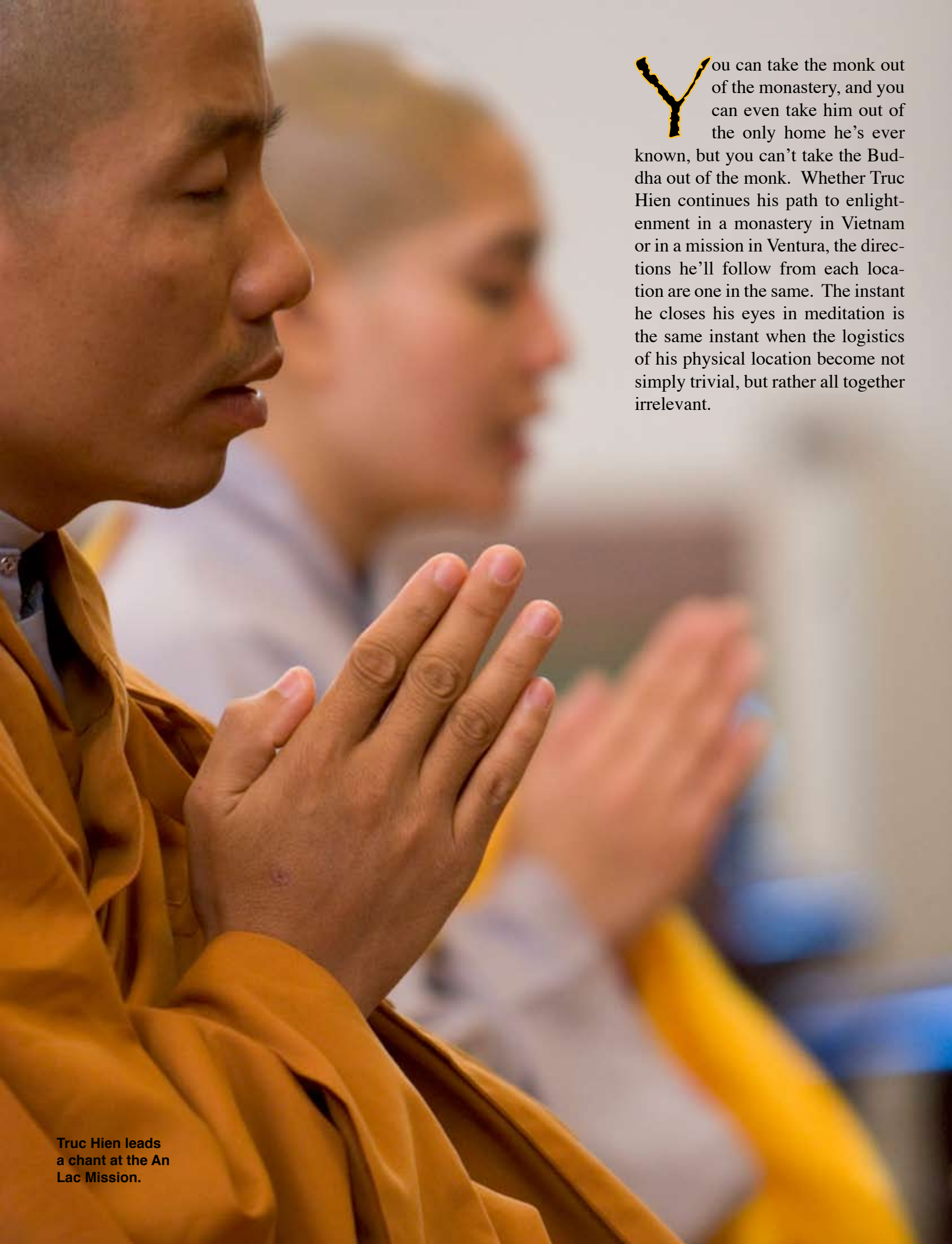
Aside from the occasional outings, which occur from time to time, the majority of interactions that a monk has with the general public are usually a result of someone walking into the mission as opposed to a monk in the mission walking out into the general public.

Hence, as a monk, Truc Hien has had to make fewer and far less drastic changes in his lifestyle upon moving to the States than would someone making that move who is not a monk.



**ABOVE**  
The illustration is a Classical Chinese character which represents "Buddha."  
**UPPER RIGHT** Hien works in the kitchen at the An Lac Mission.  
**RIGHT** Hien poses for a portrait in his room at the An Lac Mission next to his orchid.





**Y**ou can take the monk out of the monastery, and you can even take him out of the only home he's ever known, but you can't take the Buddha out of the monk. Whether Truc Hien continues his path to enlightenment in a monastery in Vietnam or in a mission in Ventura, the directions he'll follow from each location are one in the same. The instant he closes his eyes in meditation is the same instant when the logistics of his physical location become not simply trivial, but rather all together irrelevant.

Truc Hien leads a chant at the An Lac Mission.

“My definition of the Buddha.... The Greatest One.”

~ Truc Hien



LEFT Hien sits in meditation. BELOW Locals bow before the Buddhist shrine in the An Lac Mission.

