

How Does Thich Nhat Hanh Reinterpret the Four Noble Truths?

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The concept of the Four Noble Truths is one of the most important ideas in Buddhism. Traditionally, the Buddha in the Samyutta Nikaya¹ gave the first teaching on the Four Noble Truths² which is in the discourse on Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma (Pali language is Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta)

Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads

to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination.

Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, nonreliance on it.

Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: it is this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view ... right concentration.³

This is the definition of the Four Noble Truths, taught by the Buddha. Buddhist sects or schools may be different, but they all accept this teaching.

My argument is Thich Nhat Hanh critically inherits traditional definition of the Four Noble Truths and reinterprets this concept in a more positive, balanced, updated, and extensive way.

¹Versions (or parts of version) of this sutta on Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma can be found in Chinese, Sanskrit, and Tibetan languages. Bhikkhu Anayalo has translated into English, from Chinese, seven versions of this sutta, three from suttas, four from Vinayas. Details are found in his article The Chinese Parallels to the Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta (1) and The Chinese Parallels to the Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta (2).

²Actually, the first teaching of the Buddha is about the Eightfold Path then the Four Noble Truths. Nonetheless, the Eightfold Path is mentioned briefly; the Buddha just lists the eight elements of this concept.

³Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 1843-47.

By “critically inherits” I mean that on the one hand, Thich Nhat Hanh accepts the traditional explanation of the Four Noble Truths. On the other hand, he criticizes the traditional explanation, which is the transition for him to present his reinterpretation in the second part. “Positivity” means that Thich Nhat Hanh reduces negativity and emphasizes the positive aspects of the concept. “Balance” refers to how he addresses two opposite dimensions, suffering and happiness, for example. “Update” means Thich Nhat Hanh presents suffering as contemporary problems such as stress or global warming. “Extension” is that Thich Nhat Hanh lists some more concepts that he thinks the sutta may omit.

Back in 2008 in Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hanh gave a teaching in Vietnamese on the Four Noble Truths. Thich Nhat Hanh first explained how he understood this concept quite well, but not completely. Next year, he will understand the Four Noble Truths better. As we practice and study; as long as we do not think we understand this concept completely, he says, we will understand it more deeply. It is the fact that we only understand it partly, and it is true with other Buddhist concepts such as the Seven Factors of Awakening, the Eightfold Path, etc. Thich Nhat Hanh advises to write down one own’s sufferings and sufferings of others, so

everyone needs to have the Four Noble Truths of themselves.⁴

Thich Nhat Hanh critically inherits the traditional explanation of the Four Noble Truths.

Thich Nhat Hanh states that in ancient times, people explained the first truth, suffering, in a simple way: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering. These are the four sufferings. Then he criticizes that nowadays, we do not necessarily to define the suffering in these examples. It is because a birth of a child can be joy for many families. Of course during the time of birth, suffering is present; nonetheless, many other things include suffering, too. For example, one has to suffer in order to receive a degree. In addition, though birth contains some suffering, it provides joy.

Thich Nhat Hanh accepts that aging is illbeing. Because the two legs are weak, an old person can only walk with the assistance from two people, unlike a young person who jumps or runs whenever they want. Nevertheless, aging contains happiness within, he argues. Aging is calmer, not anxious like youth. Suppose a spring falls and flows fast. This is youth. Then it becomes the river which flows slowly and calmly. When having calm, people will have more peace. Aging helps people to have more time to live

⁴Thich Nhat Hanh, “Tứ Diệu Đế” [the Four Noble Truths], Lotus Library, transcribed and edited by Chan Tinh Y May 21, 2008, modified by Chan

Minh October 13, 2008, translated into English by Quang Le, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://thuvienhoasen.org/a3917/tu-dieu-de-thich-nhat-hanh>

deeply. As a result, aging may not be suffering.

Similarly, Thich Nhat Hanh agrees that illness is suffering, of course. However, he teaches, if one never gets ill, they will not understand the opposite of suffering illness, which is, in this case, happiness. Suffering teaches people that they are being happy.

Also, death may not imply suffering, he argues. For a person, who has lived for so long, is tired with difficulties in the body, death could be a positive means for them to continue living their lives with freshness and youth. Suppose one is sentenced to not death. This person has to live from this century to another century. There will be times this person is too tired and painful. Death is the soteriology so he or she is reborn peacefully and healthily.

Thich Nhat Hanh teaches that ancient people described birth, aging, illness, and death with 100% negativity. Nowadays people do not have to strictly follow these explanations. We are scholars, we are scientists, we need to explore suffering more deeply; do not just repeat the doctrine, Thich Nhat Hanh encourages. He also accepts and criticizes traditional descriptions of suffering such as not to get what one wants, separation from what is pleasing, union with what is displeasing.

Thich Nhat Hanh's Reinterpretation of the Four Noble Truths: Positivity, Balance, Update, and Extension.

⁵Thich Nhat Hanh, "Tứ Diệu Đế" [the Four Noble Truths], Lotus Library, transcribed and edited by Chan Tinh Y May 21, 2008, modified by Chan

Before presenting his new kinds of suffering, Thich Nhat Hanh does not forget to say that we are learners of Buddhism, the scientists in Buddhist practice, in the twenty-first century, we have to present differently about the first truth. Suffering is a direct experience; we should express how we experience suffering. These are our real sufferings, not from the ancient people's words which are formulae that the ancient people use to explain sufferings. Buddhism needs to bear some relevance to context, meaning it has to fulfill the real need of contemporary people, he proposes.

Positivity

Thich Nhat Hanh describes the first truth is Dukkha, meaning suffering or illbeing. On the one hand, he acknowledges that there is suffering in the first Noble Truth. On the other hand, he points out happiness is also available in the first Noble Truth. Life is not all suffering; illbeing is available but wellbeing is also available. He gives an example that when having clouds, one does not see the moon, but saying there is no moon is not correct. Thich Nhat Hanh explains that the concept of the Four Noble Truth looks like a principle in medical field: there is the pain in a patient and the doctor needs to cure; however, it does not mean that all parts of the patient's body are painful.⁵ Similar to Thich Nhat Hanh's interpretation of the First Noble Truth, Robert Gethin uses the medical principle to explain the Four Noble Truths:

Minh October 13, 2008, translated into English by Quang Le, accessed April 26, 2019,

the Disease, the Cause, the Cure, and the Medicine.⁶

On the contrary, Ajahn Brahm tends to describe that for spiritually advanced people, everything, from roses to classical music to sex, is suffering, "...to see a dew-speckled rose in the early morning sunlight is suffering, or to listen to Beethoven's imperious Fifth Symphony is dukkha, or to experience great sex is as painful as being burned."⁷

Thich Nhat Hanh does not agree with this. He states that the idea "everything is suffering" is the education of indoctrination.⁸ In the chapter *Is everything Suffering?* he points out that many Buddhists in the history tried to persuade that life is suffering, everything is suffering

For more than two thousand years, students, of Buddhism have been declaring that the Buddha taught that all

objects of perception—all physical (table, sun, moon) and

physiological phenomena and all wholesome, unwholesome, and neutral states of mind—

are suffering. One hundred years after the Buddha passed away, practitioners were already repeating the formula, "This is suffering. Life is suffering. Everything is suffering." They thought that to obtain insight into the First Noble Truth, they had to

repeat this formula...⁹

Thich Nhat Hanh rejects this notion; he hopes scholars and practitioners should not "make too great effort to prove that *everything* is suffering."¹⁰ For example, in France, 1993, he did not really accept the concept that a table, for example of a physical phenomenon,

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⁶Rupert Gethin, *The Foundation of Buddhism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 59-79.

⁷Ajahn Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond: A Meditator's Handbook* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 245-46.

⁸Thich Nhat Hanh, "Tứ Diệu Đế" [the Four Noble Truths], Lotus Library, transcribed and edited by Chan Tinh Y May 21, 2008, modified by Chan

Minh October 13, 2008, translated into English by Quang Le, accessed April 26, 2019,

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⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, "chapter five Is Everything Suffering?" in *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation* (New York: Harmony Publication, 2015), 45-53.

¹⁰Ibid, 50.

is suffering, “it is hard to understand that this table is suffering.”¹¹

In contrast, Kate Crosby explains that what we translate “suffering” comes from the Pali word of dukkha. In English, there is no translation that fulfills the meaning of this noun. Crosby continues to explain that suffering cannot apply to inanimate things, but dukkha can. It means, in her point of view, a table is dukkha. Moreover, Crosby suggests in parallel with the translation of suffering, another English word insecurity may be the translation of dukkha.¹²

Actually, Vietnamese translation of dukkha is “khổ.” Similarly, khổ, in Vietnamese language, cannot apply to inanimate things such as a table. Thich Nhat Hanh used Vietnamese as his mother tongue, then he learnt English. Do the two translations of dukkha from the two languages, English (suffering) and Vietnamese (khổ), partly conceptualize Thich Nhat Hanh’s reinterpretation of the First Noble Truth? In addition, he only learnt Pali as he got quite old. Moreover, he repeatedly rejects the statement “everything is suffering” perhaps because many Buddhist masters in Vietnam explain suffering is

universal. In other words, they say everything is suffering. Perhaps they studied from Pali and Chinese sources (Vietnam was the unique country in Asia where both Theravada Buddhism with Pali text and Mahayana with Chinese text came) which inherited traditional explanation that everything is suffering.

Thich Nhat Hanh uses a positive word, happiness, to describe the third Noble Truth, the cessation of suffering. He states the third truth can be called the truth of happiness. In addition, Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes the third truth, the cessation, is not that there is nothing left. The cessation means the cessation of suffering; when suffering is ceased, happiness is available.¹³

Thich Nhat Hanh does not include suffering when teaching three Dharma Seals. The concept of Dharma Seals is somewhat related to the Four Noble Truths, for it, in some Buddhist schools, includes suffering. Therefore, I would like to mention it. From the perspective of Theravada Buddhism, the three Dharma Seals are impermanence, suffering, and nonself. Nevertheless, Thich Nhat Hanh does not accept suffering as one of the Dharma Seals. He explains

¹¹ _____, *Trái Tim Của Bụt* [The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching], (TP. HCM, Vietnam: Synthesized Publisher, 2009), 68, translation by Quang Le.

¹²Kate Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism: Continuity, Diversity, and Identity* (UK: 2014), 17-19.

¹³Thich Nhat Hanh, *Làng Mai Nhìn Núi Thầu* [Plum Village Looks at Vulture’s Peak], (Hanoi, Vietnam: Eastern Publisher, 2014), 105-08, translation by Quang Le.

impermanence does not result in suffering. For example, if a totalitarian regime rules forever without any hope of changing for democracy and freedom, is it suffering? Permanence can be suffering.¹⁴ Teaching in Vietnamese in 1994, he explained suffering was included in the three Dharma Seals because of a wrong join in different suttas (because the transmitters memorized wrongly, they joined a part of a sutta into a different part of another sutta). Then, through the transmission, all other suttas which have the same topic repeated this falseness.¹⁵ In 2012, comparing the two Chanda sutras in Chinese Samyutta Agama and that one in Pali, he describes in the Chinese sutta, the three Dharma Seals are impermanence, nonself, and nirvana while in the Pali Samyutta Nikaya, there are only two: impermanence and nonself, because of the wrong transmission.¹⁶ In addition, using Nagarjuna's Mahaprajnaparamita, Thich

Nhat Hanh states that the three Dharma Seals are impermanence, nonself, and nirvana.¹⁷ Similarly, using English to write in a book in 1998, he repeats his confirmation that the three Dharma Seals are impermanence, nonself, and nirvana.¹⁸

However, as time passes, his reinterpretation of Dharma Seals has become moderate, for he does not strongly exclude suffering. On the one hand, in 2006, Thich Nhat Hanh repeats the three Dharma Seals are impermanence, non-self, and nirvana. On the other hand, he accepts Four Dharma Seals or Five Dharma Seals with one condition that they include nirvana. For him, nirvana includes happiness, as explained in the *Balance* section of this paper below. The Four Dharma Seals should be impermanence, suffering, nonself, and nirvana. The Five Dharma Seals should be impermanence, suffering, emptiness, nonself, and nirvana.¹⁹ Similarly, as he gets very old in his life, in

¹⁴ _____, *Làng Mai Nhìn Núi Thầu* [Plum Village Looks at Vulture's Peak], (Hanoi, Vietnam: Eastern Publisher, 2014), 64-67, translation by Quang Le.

¹⁵ _____, *Trái Tim Của Bụt* [The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching], (TP. HCM, Vietnam: Synthesized Publisher, 2009), 261-68, translation by Quang Le.

¹⁶ _____, *Tri Kì Của Bụt* [Soulmate of the Buddha], (Hanoi, Vietnam: Eastern Publisher, 2014), 175-204, translation by Quang Le.

¹⁷ _____, *Trái Tim Của Bụt* [The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching], (TP. HCM, Vietnam: Synthesized Publisher, 2009), 261-68, translation by Quang Le.

¹⁸ _____, "chapter 18 The Three Dharma Seals" in *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998), 131-45.

¹⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Làng Mai Nhìn Núi Thầu* [Plum Village Looks at Vulture's Peak], (Hanoi, Vietnam: Eastern Publisher, 2014), 64-67, translation by Quang Le.

2012, Thich Nhat Hanh concludes the Three Dharma Seals have to include nirvana. He states they are impermanence, nonself, and nirvana. Thich Nhat Hanh says Buddhism without nirvana is not Buddhism. One can see how positive Thich Nhat Hanh is in his interpretation of the Dharma Seals whose suffering is repeatedly analyzed.

As described above, Theravada accepts impermanence, suffering, and nonself as the three Dharma Seals. Differently, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Mahayana generally, states the three Dharma Seals are impermanence, nonself, and nirvana. How is Vajrayana's attitude? The Dalai Lama, in his teaching on *The Four Seals in Buddhism*, states that they are impermanence, suffering, nonself and emptiness, and nirvana.²⁰ Interestingly, when explaining suffering, he emphasizes on afflictive emotions; he does not state everything is suffering. It means on the one hand, the Dalai Lama is similar to Thich Nhat Hanh when explaining suffering is something related to human. On the other hand, the Dalai Lama's Dharma Seals include both Theravada's and Mahayana's statement.

Balance

²⁰Dalai Lama, "The Four Seals in Buddhism" in *Many Ways to Nirvana*, ed. Renuka Singh (New Delhi, India: Penguin Books India, 2004), 1-41.

²¹Thich Nhat Hanh, *Làng Mai Nhìn Núi Thừ* [Plum Village Looks at Vulture's Peak], (Hanoi, Vietnam: Eastern Publisher, 2014), 105-08, translation by Quang Le.

Thich Nhat Hanh explains the first truth is not life is all suffering; the first truth means there is suffering and there is happiness. He again, explains the third truth is the cessation of illbeing. It also means the availability of happiness. He says the two truths, first and third, are opposite. Accepting the first truth, one has to accept the third truth. It is like there is mud, so there is lotus; if there is no mud, there will be no lotus. It means happiness is available in historical dimension of the third truth. Also, using both Theravada and Mahayana sources, he proposes nirvana includes happiness. It also means happiness is available in the ultimate dimension of the third truth.²¹

Balance can be seen that Thich Nhat Hanh explains the Buddha "did not deny the existence of suffering, but he also did not deny the existence of joy and happiness."²²

Thich Nhat Hanh, in France, 2006, explains that the Second Noble Truth, the origin of suffering, is the Wrong Eightfold Path. They are wrong view, wrong intention, wrong speech, wrong action, wrong livelihood, wrong energy, wrong mindfulness, and wrong concentration.²³ The

²²_____, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation* (New York: Harmony Publication, 2015), 31-32.

²³_____, "Tập Đề Là Bát Tà Đạo" [*Origin of Suffering Is the Wrong Eightfold Path*], translated

Wrong Eightfold Path is the opposite aspects of the Eightfold Path: balanced.

In addition, the balance can be found in his declaration whether the Four Noble Truths are conditioned or unconditioned. In a Dharma Talk, Thich Nhat Hanh presents some Buddhist schools states the first, second, and fourth truths are conditioned Dharmas; the third truth is unconditioned Dharma. He also points out the rest of other Buddhist schools declare the first and the second truths are conditioned Dharmas while the third and the fourth truths are unconditioned Dharmas. Then Thich Nhat Hanh declares his statement that in the historical dimension: the Four Noble Truths are all conditioned Dharmas. In the ultimate dimension: the Four Noble Truths are all unconditioned Dharmas.²⁴

Update

Thich Nhat Hanh firstly presents stress as an updated kind of suffering.²⁵ Contemplatively, we are aware that we live in the century, the environment that creates

stress in body and mind, he presents. Politicians, businessmen, educators, and all others do not have time to live. People are too busy; they worry for their work. Buddhist abbots and nuns also have many work to do with deadlines. Hence, people have accumulated stress day by day. One of ways to transform this suffering is to use Discourse on the Full Awareness of Breathing, he advises. When sitting meditation, people do not have to do anything. People should then use the breath, taught by the Buddha, to release stress out of the body and mind. This is the fourth truth: one of the ways to end stress, he suggests the solution.²⁶

Thich Nhat Hanh continues to describe some familiar kinds of suffering. Unease is suffering physically and psychologically. Pain, oppression, and stress can lead to unease. Unease is unhappiness. People stand uneasily, people sit uneasily, people lie uneasily. This is the real suffering in them and in the society. People sit like sitting on fire; in contrast, the Buddha sits

from Vietnamese into English by Quang Le, accessed April 26, 2019, video lecture, <https://phatphapungdung.com/tap-de-la-bat-ta-dao-thich-nhat-hanh-9875.html>

²⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Làng Mai Nhìn Núi Thừ* [Plum Village Looks at Vulture's Peak], (Hanoi, Vietnam: Eastern Publisher, 2014), 101-04 translation by Quang Le.

²⁵ _____, "Tứ Diệu Đế" [the Four Noble Truths], Lotus Library, transcribed and edited by Chan Tinh Y May 21, 2008, modified by Chan Minh

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²⁶ One can see the balance here also that Thich Nhat Hanh forwardly uses a contemporary problem, stress, to define the first truth, suffering, while he backwardly presents a Buddhist sutta as the fourth truth, the path. Sometimes, the two characteristics, update and balance, for example, overlap one another.

peacefully with his smile. In addition, unease includes worry, fear, despair, anger, violence. People have these negative energies within, but they do not know how to transform them. Consequently, they become bombs of mental formations. Similarly, he indirectly suggests the Discourse on the Full Awareness of Breathing as a tool to deal with these sufferings. He also says this sutta is very scientific and can be applied to public health, psychotherapy, and also in politics and education as well. In my opinion, using this sutta to cure stress or unease is a kind of updated solution.

Committing suicide is another new suffering that Thich Nhat Hanh presents. Lack of communication is another suffering presented by him. In addition, children leaving home is a new kind of suffering. These sufferings above could be individual. On the global scale, he describes some new sufferings such as global warming, greenhouse effect, climate change, and environmental pollution.

Thich Nhat Hanh also uses the same medical principle in order to deal with new sufferings. Using unease as an example to demonstrate the second truth, the making of illbeing, he explains the making of illbeing roots in busy and worried life. In order to clearly find the second truth, people need to name the first truth; they need to cling on the first truth and to prescribe completely the making of unease. We are practitioners, we are scientists, so our text is mathematic, too, without unclearness. Once finding the second truth, we find the fourth truth, the way leading to cease illbeing. Finally, we find the

third truth, the cessation of illbeing, he presents the principle.

Similarly, Thich Nhat Hanh uses global warming as another example to demonstrate the four noble truths which is updated and applied to a modern context. Two of reasons for global warming are using cars and automobiles, which produces CO₂, and consuming meat. It is valuable that Thich Nhat Hanh not only teaches the theory but also applies it in the daily life. At Dear Park, one of his monasteries in Southern California, his lay Buddhists offer 60,000 no-car days (one car does not go in one day counts one no-car day. If a car does not go in two days or two cars do not go in one day, there are two no-car days). Furthermore, a number of his lay disciples practice one no-car day weekly. His monastic disciples do not eat meat, of course; they eat vegetarian foods. He encourages his lay disciples to eat vegetarian foods 15 days monthly. No-car days and being vegetarian are concrete practices to reduce global warming.

Extension

Thich Nhat Hanh extensively explains the Second Noble Truth, the cause of suffering. He describes that suffering is not only caused by craving but also by other afflictions such as anger and ignorance, but it was omitted to memorize more easily in Buddhist tradition.

Another common misunderstanding of the Buddha's teaching is that all of our suffering is caused by craving. In the *Discourse on Turning the Wheel of the Dharma*, the Buddha did say that craving is the cause of suffering, but he said this because craving is the first

on the list of afflictions (*kleshas*). If we use our intelligence, we can see that craving can be a cause of pain, but other afflictions such as anger, ignorance, suspicion, arrogance, and wrong views can also cause pain and suffering. Ignorance, which gives rise to wrong perceptions, is responsible for much of our pain. To make sure the suttas shorter and therefore easier to memorize, the first item on a list was often used to represent the whole list. The word “eyes,” for example, is used in many suttas to represent all six sense organs... and the “form” is often used to represent all Five Aggregates (*skandhas*)... To say that craving is the cause of all our suffering is too simplistic...²⁷

In another teaching, he explains that in the first teaching, the Buddha clearly states the fourth truth, the way leading to the cessation of suffering, is the Eightfold Path, not the way leading to the cessation of craving. Cessation of craving is a small part of the third truth. Moreover, Thich Nhat Hanh says instead of craving, it is righter to say the second truth is ignorance. Nonetheless, only ignorance is not enough; one should include wrong view, wrong intention, wrong speech...²⁸

²⁷Thich Nhat Hanh, “chapter five Is Everything Suffering?” in *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation* (New York: Harmony Publication, 2015), 52.

With the deployment of the Wrong Eightfold Path, one can see he supplements the origin of suffering in a direction that is lacked in traditional teaching. This is also a kind of extension but because the Wrong Eightfold Path is mentioned above in the *balance* part, I will not repeat about it here.

It should be noticeable that sometimes, each of the four concepts positivity, balance, update, and extension overlaps one another in Thich Nhat Hanh’s interpretation. For example, stress and global warming could be included as two extensions of the first Noble Truth, but they are not mentioned in this part because they were presented above in the *Update* part.

Conclusion

In this work I present the definition of the Four Noble Truths, explained by the Buddha. Then I argue that Thich Nhat Hanh critically inherits this teaching while reinterpreting the Four Noble Truths in a positive, balanced, updated, and extensive way. Also, when describing the four characteristics interpreted by him, I include some similar and different opinions from Rupert Gethin, Kate Crosby, and Ajahn Brahm. I also write about how Thich Nhat Hanh, then Dalai Lama, describes Dharma Seals whose suffering is debatable. Further research showed that in 2013 Thich Nhat Hanh states that a teaching is not Buddhism,

²⁸_____, *Làng Mai Nhìn Núi Thầu* [Plum Village Looks at Vulture’s Peak], (Hanoi, Vietnam: Eastern Publisher, 2014), 141-44, translation by Quang Le.

even though it includes the name of the Four Noble Truths, if it is not relevant to the circumstance (the context that human lives). It is very necessary, according Thich Nhat Hanh, that the tradition must be relevant to the abilities of learners. Even though they are the Four Noble Truths or the Eightfold Path, they are not Buddhism because the learners do not understand to put them into practice.²⁹ Researchers could use this interpretation from him as a reference to analyze when does a teaching of the Four Noble Truths belong to Buddhism, when does not? Other promising future research topics include how Thich Nhat Hanh reinterprets the Dependent Origination, how Thich Nhat Hanh reinterprets Nirvana, or how Thich Nhat Hanh reinterprets Christianity.

²⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, “Duy Biểu Học Ứng Dụng: 06. Sự Khế Cơ và Làm Mới Đạo Bụt” [Applied

Manifestation-Only: 06. Suitability and Buddhist Refreshment] November 21, 2018, video lecture, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7EC-7sQLUY>.

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