

Lacquered Thiền:**A New Face of Thiền Manifested through Sinic-Vietnamese Contact as a “Cocktail Thiền” of Vietnamese Buddhism**

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1. Introductions

The aim of this research paper is to re-investigate the foundation of *Thiền Trúc Lâm School* of Vietnamese Buddhism, and thus its philosophical and cultural significance as representing Vietnam “pure” Buddhism.¹ This Thiền School is considered to be the “first serious effort to establish a Zen school in medieval Vietnam.”² The Thiền Trúc Lâm School became a national symbol of Vietnamese independence as a response to Vietnamese *de-Sinicization* efforts. Amongst Vietnamese Buddhist scholars, there are two opposite attitudes regarding this Zen school. The first attitude is that most Vietnamese Buddhist scholars [inside Vietnam] regard this Zen school as a “pure Vietnamese” Zen school. For example, Le Manh That³ proposed that a Vietnamese ruler, “Trần Nhân Tông established a stream of Thiền Trúc Lâm Yên Tử which reflected *pure*

¹ 禪, or *Thiền* in Vietnamese, *Ch’an* in Chinese, and *Zen* in Japanese. For a convenient usage, I will use these three forms of language to express this concept. When I say “Zen” that I do not intend the Zen of Japanese only but it might a way of common usage of this term for majority of the Mahayana Buddhists. This term is coined from *dhyaana* in Sanskrit—mediation. See D.T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism: An Introduction*, (New York: Grove Press), 32-37; and See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Zen Keys*, (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

² Nguyen Tu Cuong, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam: A Study and Translation of the Thiền Uyển Tap Anh*, (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press: 1997), 20.

³ Le Manh That holds a Ph.D in Buddhist Philosophy from University of Wisconsin (where he studied during 1965-1974), and is currently a professor in History of Vietnamese Buddhism. He is also the Vice President of the Vietnamese Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City. His numerous works on the history of Vietnamese Buddhist have been adopted as official historical sources for Buddhist studies programs in Vietnam.

Vietnameseness based on the doctrine of *Cư trần lạc đạo*,⁴ a purely Vietnamese text, the Nôm.⁵ Likewise, Thich Phuoc Dat, another Vietnamese Buddhist scholar, stated that “the Thiền Trúc Lâm School carried one authentic color of the independence of people [the Vietnamese], sovereignty, because it had never relied on or incorporated influences from any Ch’an schools from China.”⁶ The second attitude is that there is no “pure” Vietnamese Buddhism; but in fact, Vietnamese Buddhism is a unique cocktail version of blending and incorporation of other influences, predominately from China. This second attitude can be observed in the works of Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, a Buddhist scholar [outside Vietnam], and founder of the Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon during the Vietnam/American War. He evaluated the Thiền Trúc Lâm School and considered it to be the “backbone for the independent foundation of Vietnamese Buddhism” even though it had welcomed some influences from Chinese Buddhism, Indian Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhism; it still however, held for itself the “special characteristics” of independent Đại Việt.⁷

⁴ “Vua Trần Nhân Tông đã thành lập dòng thiền Trúc Lâm Yên Tử *thuần túy* Việt Nam với chủ trương Cư trần lạc đạo.” In Le Manh That. “*Toàn Tập Trần Nhân Tông*” (*A Complete Collection of Trần Nhân Tông*), NXB Phuong Dong, 2010), 8.

⁵ This philosophical doctrine is also the title of the text, its literal meaning is that “*Dwelling in a dusty world with Joy of Practicing of the Dharma*.” Its title is the title of a text - 居塵樂道賦 in classical Chinese or *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú* in modern Vietnamese (Quoc Ngu) - of the King Trần Nhân Tông, third King of the Trần dynasty, who founded the Thiền Trúc Lâm School.

⁶ “[...] một Thiền phái mang đậm một bản sắc dân tộc độc lập, tự chủ không hề phụ thuộc hay chịu ảnh hưởng bất cứ Thiền phái nào của Trung Hoa.” See Thich Phước Đạt, *Gia Tri Văn Học Trong Tác Phẩm của Thiền Phái Trúc Lâm* (*The Value of Literature of Trúc Lâm Zen School*), (Ho Chi Minh City: NXB Hong Duc, 2013), 43. This book was his Ph.D dissertation in 2008, and it was republished as a book in 2013. Currently, he is another Vice President in Vietnamese Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City of Vietnam.

⁷ “Phật Giáo Trúc Lâm là một nền Phật giáo độc lập; uy tín tinh thần của nó là uy tín tinh thần quốc gia Đại Việt. Nó là xương sống của một nền văn hóa Việt Nam độc lập. Nền Phật giáo này, tuy có tiếp nhận những ảnh hưởng

Yet, the dispute continues and there is no common or unanimous conclusion. As an additional example, Nguyen Tu Cuong, another Vietnamese Buddhist scholar working outside Vietnam from George Mason University in Virginia, argued that the Zen schools in Vietnam, including the Thiền Trúc Lâm School, “only stems from the elite eager to bring orthodoxy to Vietnamese Buddhism.” In other words, it is a “fabrication” for a small group of Vietnamese.⁸ On the other hand, in his book *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, Nguyen Tu Cuong stated that the Trúc Lâm Zen School is a *genuinely* Vietnamese Buddhist school.⁹ These disagreements amongst scholars, namely whether Thiền Trúc Lâm School is purely Vietnamese or whether it was influenced by other cultures and traditions that motivated me to conduct a re-examination of the true face of the Thiền Trúc Lâm School of Vietnamese Buddhism.

Is it true that the Trúc Lâm School is *thuần túy*,¹⁰ a true reflection of pure Vietnamese Buddhism? What is pure Vietnamese Buddhism; is there such a thing? In order to approach these question, as an approximation closer to reality, I consider the text of *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú* which was written in *Chữ Nôm* by the founder of this Zen school. My first task was to transliterate and translate this text into the current Vietnamese language. *Chữ Nôm* literally means “Southern script” which was invented based on Chinese logographic script by the Vietnamese scholars such as Nguyễn Thuyên – he was the first scholar who used Chữ Nôm to compose poetry in the 1280s.¹¹ This text was composed in the form of *Phú* (賦 or *fú* in Chinese). The *phú* is a type of rhymed

của Phật giáo Trung Hoa, Ấn Độ và Tây Tạng nhưng vẫn giữ tính đặc biệt của mình.” See Nguyen Lang (Thich Nhat Hanh), *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận [Commentary of History of Vietnamese Buddhism]*, Vol 1 -3, (Ho Chi Minh City: NXB Phương Đông: 2012), 298. This volume was his textbook during his teaching on history of Vietnamese Buddhism at Columbia University in the 1960s.

⁸ Nguyen Tu Cuong, “Rethinking Vietnamese Buddhist History: Is the Thiền Uyển Tập Anh a ‘Transmission of the Lamp’ Text?” in the book of *Essays into Vietnamese Past*, edited by K.W. Taylor and John K. Whitmore, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1995,” 113.

⁹ Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 20.

¹⁰ It means “pure,” “authentic,” or genuine.

¹¹ Chữ Nôm appeared about the 3rd century of the Christian era in various forms; however, it was first used for writing and compose poetry in the early 13th century in Đại Việt. See K.W. Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 120.

prose that originated in Chinese literature during the Western Han period (206 BCE – 39 CE).¹² It was widely used in Chinese literature to express appreciation for the beauty of nature from the countryside or to criticize the government. O. W. Wolters, a Southeast Asian historian, observed that it “became a successful Vietnamese localization of Chinese literacy form during the second half of the fourteenth century.”¹³ King Trần Nhân Tông composed this *phu* to express his understanding of Buddhist philosophy for his Trúc Lâm Zen School.

Regarding my approach to the translation work, first, I engaged in transliteration from *Chữ Nôm* into *Chữ Quốc Ngữ* (or the current Vietnamese language) for the Vietnamese audience. However, I did not provide footnotes for this version of transliteration (English speakers will not find this useful). Second, I then translated this *Chữ Quốc Ngữ* version into English (this is the first time this document has been translated into English) with brief footnotes for each chapter. I hope that English readers may benefit from this translation and gain an understanding of this rich, original text.

Upon completing this translation work, I then took a step back to consider the historical background that gave rise to the birth and dispute about the origins of Vietnamese Buddhism, from the beginning to the Trần dynasty (1225-1440). My aim was to identify the possible Sinic factors that influenced or may have influenced the shaping of Vietnamese Buddhism. Along these lines, the paper then continues by examining the origination of the text *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*. I analyzed the philosophical doctrines that are included in the text, to highlight the presence or absence of its Sinic influences. These steps were done with the intention of pointing out the presence of *Viet-factors* versus the presence of *Sinic-factors*, in order to see whether the Trúc Lâm Zen School is a genuine reflection or authentic form of Vietnamese Buddhism, or whether it is simply a version of Chinese Buddhism. By doing this, I hope we can see the true face of this Zen school objectively and from a scholarly viewpoint.

Background History of Vietnamese Buddhism in period of pre-Trần dynasty

First, this section does not intend to provide a complete and thorough discourse about the history of Vietnamese Buddhism, but rather, I review some major Buddhist schools that were influential in shaping Buddhism in Vietnam. Specifically, I draw attention to the possible Sinic influences in these Zen schools of Vietnamese Buddhism. This attempt will reveal that there is nothing called *thuan tuy Vietnam* or “pure Vietnamese [Buddhism]” as some scholars argued in

¹² Wilhelm, Hellmut, "The Scholar's Frustration: Notes on a Type of 'fu'," in *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, ed. John King Fairbanks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 310-19.

¹³ O. W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*. Revised Edition (Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1999), 185.

regard to the Trúc Lâm Zen School; in fact, I propose that there is no pure Vietnamese Buddhism, but that it is more like a “cocktail” version.¹⁴

The first “seed” for the Thiền Trúc Lâm School was planted by the Thiền Khuong Tang Hoi School, founded by Master Tăng Hội (Kang Shen Hui). Although Master Tăng Hội’s birthday is still unknown, we do know that he was born around the first decade of the third century, and that the year of his death was recorded on 280 C.E. His father was a Sogdian trader and his mother was a woman of Giao Châu – (交州, Jiaozhou)¹⁵. Nguyen Tai Thu and his colleagues argued that he was born in Sogdiane – a country in Central Asia that now is Uzbekistan, but there is no evidence to confirm this.¹⁶ However, I think, he was born in Vietnam because in the preface of *Anapanasati Sutra*,¹⁷ he states that his parents passed away when he was ten years old and he was accepted by a temple in Giao Châu which is located in Vietnam; so he was a Vietnamese boy at that time. Thich Nhat Hanh concluded that Khuong Tang Hoi was the “first Zen teacher in Vietnam.”¹⁸ He wrote numerous works that included *Anapanasati*, the *Skandha-shatu-ayatana*¹⁹, the *Ugradatta*, the *Tree of the Bodhisattva’s Path*²⁰, the *Smrtipasthana*, and the *Sutra of Forty-Two Chapters*, the *Prajnaparamita in Eight Thousand Lines*²¹, and the *Collection on the Six Paramitas*²².

The *Collection on the Six Paramitas* was compiled by himself. In this work, he emphasized the six virtues of an idealistic person – a Bodhisattva – who engages into life to serve living beings in order to help them cross over to the other shore (which means *paramita*), the shore of happiness or perfection. How? His methodology of meditation is based on *Anapanasati* sutra – a basic meditation for the Theravadin Buddhism School that focuses on the technique of mindful breathing. The English translation of the Preface of *Anapanasati* shows that Khuong Tang Hoi, which Thich

¹⁴ In my other paper, I propose a “theory of cocktail” for Buddhist studies in Vietnamese and elsewhere.

¹⁵ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Master Tang Hoi: First Zen Teacher in Vietnam and China*, (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 2001), 12.

¹⁶ Nguyen Tai Thu, *History of Buddhism in Vietnam* (Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008), 36

¹⁷ Taisho Tripitaka, No. 602.

¹⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh. *Master Tang Hoi*, 1.

¹⁹ Taisho Tripitaka. No. 603.

²⁰ Taisho Tripitaka. No. 532

²¹ Taisho Tripitaka.No.229

²² Taisho Tripitaka. No. 152

Nhat Hanh translated, wrote it: “Mindfulness of breathing is the great vehicle used by the Buddhas to save beings who are tossing up and down and drowning in the ocean of great suffering.”²³ The image of a Bodhisattva who engages with society by “mediation on breathing” as a tool (or *upaya* – skillful means) to help society to reduce suffering, reflects the philosophy of Engaged Buddhism that was deeply embedded in the Thiền Khuong Tang Hoi School. During this time, Vietnam was under Chinese dominance, through policies that promulgated “Chinese hegemony,”²⁴ so there was much suffering and injustice in the society. Buddhism became a response to such oppression and adverse circumstances. Moreover, the idea of “engaged Buddhism” of this school became exported to China during the Warring States after the fall of Han Empire in 229 C.E. Giao Châu was part of Dong Wu, and Master Tăng Hội traveled to Dong Wu in 247. The ruler of this region was King Sun Quan or 孫權 (182-252), and Tang Hoi challenged the king and received the support of Sun Quan to establish the First Temple (Chùa Kiến Sơ). Master Tang Hoi formed the Buddhist sangha and organized an ordination ceremony for the monks in southern China under Sun Quan’s support.

Although Master Khuong Tang Hoi, arguably of Vietnam origins, is regarded as the first Zen master of Vietnam, Vietnamese Buddhism was first formulated with influences from India and later China with increasing Chinese dominance. In fact, the official language for *sutras* study was classical Chinese. Chinese factors played a very important role in development of Vietnamese Buddhism during pre-Trần dynasty that was the background for the development of the Trúc Lâm Zen School; therefore, Buddhist scholars who argue that this Zen school is a “pure” Vietnamese is basing such claims subjectively, appealing to personal biases. We see that Sinic influences continued throughout Vietnamese Buddhist history.

The second Thiền School of Vietnam which contributed to the emergence of the Thiền Trúc Lâm School is the Thiền Tỳ-ni-đa-lưu-chi (Vinitaruci) School, which has its origin from China and India. Evidence for tracing this influence back to India is based on *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* – a collection of biographies of high monks of Vietnam that was compiled during the fourteenth century by “collective authors.”²⁵ Zen master Tỳ-ni-đa-lưu-chi (Vinitaruci), an Indian monk, first came to China before he ventured to Giao Châu (Vietnam) sometime during 580 C.E. He passed away in 594. He was a student of Tăng Xán or *Sengcan*²⁶ – the third Patriarch of Chinese Ch’an Buddhism after the legendary First Patriarch Bodhidharma. In other words, his training was in the Chinese Ch’an Buddhism tradition. He established a Thiền school that bears his name in Vietnam. This shows that even though he was an Indian Buddhist monk, his training was in Chinese Ch’an tradition. This school merged into the Thiền Vô Ngôn Thông School, to be discussed shortly; by

²³ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Master Tang Hoi*, 87.

²⁴ Nguyen Tu Cuong, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 9.

²⁵ See Nguyen Tu Cuong, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 9.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 37-43.

event of Master Thuong Chieu came to teach Dharma as a head monk or Dharma teacher (toạ chủ) at Luc To temple, an old temple of the Tỳ-ni-đa-lưu-chi School.²⁷ And Thuong Chieu was a great-grandmaster of King Trần Nhân Tông, who founded the Trúc Lâm Zen school. Nguyen Tu Cuong argued strongly that this school is “an effort to rationalize the root of this Vietnamese line of Buddhism in Chinese Zen” in terms of legitimizing its orthodoxy as a continuum of the Chinese Chan tradition.²⁸ Thus, the evidence does not support the view of some Vietnamese Buddhist scholars that the Trúc Lâm Zen School is a *thuần túy* Vietnamese Zen school.²⁹

The third school that also laid a solid stone for construction of the Thiền Trúc Lâm School is the Thiền Vô Ngôn Thông School, which also had its origins in China. According to *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh*, in the year 820, Zen master Vô Ngôn Thông came to Vietnam from China, but passed away six years later. He lived in Kiến Sơ Temple - 建初寺 (in present day Hanoi – Vietnam). His Thiền School bears his name, like the Thiền of Vinitaruci.³⁰ According to the lineage of this school, the first patriarch was Zen master Vô Ngôn Thông and the second was Cầm Thành; the last generation was the Zen master Tiêu Diêu. There were seventeen generations of this school.

The philosophy of the Thiền Vô Ngôn Thông School emphasizes the practice of *đốn ngộ* - 頓悟 – or sudden enlightenment, which means people can experience the enlightenment at any given moment, and it is not necessary to practice gradually (漸悟). In tracing back the origins of Vô Ngôn Thông’s basic teaching, one can see that it is based on Huineng’s teaching- the Sixth patriarch of Chan Buddhism of China; he is the root-master of Vô Ngôn Thông’s philosophy. He achieved enlightenment under the training of the Thiền master *Bǎizhàng Huáihái* 百丈懷海 - Bách Trọng Hoài Hải (779 - 803), who was the author of *Bach Truong Thanh Quy*³¹ (The Bǎizhàng’s

²⁷ Nguyen Lang (Thich Nhat Hanh), *Vietnam Phat Giao Su Luan*, 164. Consulting the chart of 23 first patriarchs of Yen Tu School on page 165 too. According to this chart, there is a connection that shows a link of the Thiền Vô Ngôn Thông with King Trần Nhân Tông as Zen Master Thuong Chieu was teacher of Zen Master Hien Quang (d.1221) who was first “stone” for the establishment of Thiền Trúc Lâm School later by Trần Nhân Tông.

²⁸ Nguyen Tu Cuong, “Rethinking Vietnamese Buddhist History,” 103.

²⁹ “*thuan tuy*” means “pure” or “authenticity”.

³⁰ Le Manh That, *Lich Su Phat Giao Vietnam (History of Vietnamese Buddhism)*, Vol.2, (Ho Chi Minh City: Nha Xuat Ban Tong Hop, 2006), 230.

³¹ *Bach Truong Thanh Quy*, a manual for Cha’n practice tradition of Song Dynasty of China.

Principle: 一日不作一日不食 - *no working a day, no eating a day*). This principle was applied in the Wu Yang Tong School in Vietnam throughout seventeen generations. We can see the practice of Thiền is not to eliminate daily life in the sense of “*Ordinary Mind as the Way*”.³² Instead, “working” and “eating” are two important factors for happiness in life reflecting the nature of inseparation between Zen’s practice and ordinary daily activities (i.e., direct involvement with the mundane, not avoiding the mundane). One can see that Trần Nhân Tông emphasized this principle again as it became the principle of the Thiền Trúc Lâm School:

饑則飧兮困則眠 (*Classical Chinese*)

Đói cứ ăn đi mệt ngủ liền (Modern Vietnamese)

*Whenever hungry, just eat; whenever sleepy, just sleep.*³³

This principle illustrates the pragmatics of practicing Thiền (Zen) during the Tran dynasty, practicing Thiền is not a vaguely conceived idea but directly relates to life as it is lived in reality. D.T. Suzuki, a great scholar who spread Japanese Zen to the world, commented that Zen does not promote “nihilism” (because of the doctrine of emptiness – *sunyata*) and it is not a “quibbling,” “playing at words,” or “sophistry;” but it is “the most serious concern in the world.”³⁴ Thus, Thiền in Vietnam is not practicing exclusion, but wholehearted inclusion; it concerns the quality of human living in order to bring more happiness and peace for life. Indeed, this reflects the spirit of engaging with society. Le Manh That even suggested that this principle should become the “theory of nation-state” of the Tran dynasty because it satisfied the basic pragmatic needs as foods (wealth) and sleeps (security) of the Dai Viet society.³⁵

According to the lineage of the patriarch of this school during the Tran dynasty, Trần Thái Tông (the first king of Tran dynasty, Trần Nhân Tông’s grandfather), Tran Thanh Tong (second king, his father), and Tue Trung Thuong Si (his uncle and his Zen teacher) are the disciples of this

³² “即心即佛, *jixin jiffo*, tức tâm tức Phật, Mind is the Buddha.” This is one of the doctrines of Ch’an Master Mazu Daoyi (709-788) in China. See Andy Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage: The Masters and Their Teachings* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 65-76; and Mario Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way: the Hongzhou School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 182-186.

³³ This line is in the last verse of Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú. Please see my translation for more details.

³⁴ D.T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 56-57.

³⁵ Le Manh That conceptualized this line of note 36 as “*ly thuyet nha nuoc* or *theory of polity*” of the Tran dynasty, see Le Manh That, *Toan Tap Trần Nhân Tông*, 226.

school.³⁶ Therefore, either the relationship between the Thiền Trúc Lâm School and this Thiền School is very close, or Thiền Trúc Lâm is a continuation of the Thiền Vô Ngôn Thông School. This school provided a solid foundation for the appearance of Thiền Trúc Lâm School in both practice and philosophy. Again, we see that the Thiền Trúc Lâm School adopted these “Chinese doctrines” of Ch’an Buddhism in China. Therefore, to conclude that the Trúc Lâm Zen School is a “genuinely” Vietnamese Buddhism is not convincing because the Chinese Ch’an doctrines were the backbone for the establishment of the Trúc Lâm.

The last imported Buddhist school prior to the establishment of the Thiền Trúc Lâm School is the Thiền Thảo Đường School. With the continuous support of Buddhism from the kings of the Ly dynasty (1010-1225), the second ruler Ly Thanh Tong (1023-72) established the Thiền Thảo Đường School. He thus became the first generation of this school. Zen master Thảo Đường, a Chinese master who was a student of Xuedou Zhijian of Ch’an from China,³⁷ was captured in Champa during Dai Viet’s attack in 1069. In discovering, that he was a great Thiền master and Buddhist scholar, King Ly Thanh Tong expressed his deep admiration for this monk’s knowledge of Buddhism. He became Zen master Thảo Đường’s disciple and studied with him.

In fact, Zen master Thảo Đường was granted the title of “Quốc sư”, meaning “teacher of the country” or national Zen master by Ly Thanh Tong. Whitmore and his colleagues remarked that “at this time, Vietnamese society consisted of an aristocracy, a religious class (the Buddhist community), and peasants” and Dai Viet interacted and borrowed ideology from “its Southeast Asian neighbors”³⁸ such as Champa in terms of shaping and aligning its country with the Buddhist philosophy. Le Manh That argued that “until Ly Thanh Tong’s reign, the strategy of development of Dai Viet was more clear cut, the direction of development of country with Buddhist philosophy as its core force.”³⁹ Thich Thien An added “As the first patriarch of the Thao Duong sect, Ly Thanh Tong was instrumental in establishing the teaching of his master in Vietnam, and in providing a suitable ecology for the growth of the Thiền Thảo Đường School.” The four successors of Ly monarchs of the Ly were equally earnest Buddhist patrons, including Ly Anh Tong (ruled 1138-1175) and Ly Cao Tong (ruled 1176-1210) who received the “*seal-of-mind* or *tam an*”⁴⁰ to become

³⁶ Nguyen Lang, *Viet Nam Phat Giao Su Luan (Commentary of History of Vietnam Buddhism)* (NXB Phuong Dong), 166.

³⁷ See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 337-340.

³⁸ Whitmore, *Source of Vietnamese Traditions*, 9.

³⁹ Le manh Thanh. *Lich Su Phat Giao Viet Nam (History of Vietnamese Buddhism)* (TP HCM: Tong Hop).vol. III, 15.

⁴⁰ Traditional transmission the Dharma between Zen master to disciple. The central practice in Chinese Zen tradition.

third and the fifth patriarchs in the School of Thiền Thảo Đường.⁴¹ Again, we can see clearly the influence of Chinese Buddhist philosophy during the Ly dynasty and its penetration into the political affairs during the Ly dynasty. However, this school's impact was on the royal cohort rather than the lay community because its nature of richness in poetic style and this style strongly influenced the monks of Vô Ngôn Thông and Tỳ-ni-đa-lưu-chi, which were the foundational schools for the Thiền Trúc Lâm School.⁴²

Again, we see clearly that the Thiền Thảo Đường that originated from China strongly penetrated into the establishment of the Thiền Trúc Lâm School. This evidence tells us that the Thiền Trúc Lâm School arose based dominantly on “Chinese factors.” In sum, the emergence of all schools of Zen described above with their strong roots in Chinese Ch’an Buddhism should give us conclusive evidence that the establishment of the Thiền Trúc Lâm School is not a “pure” Vietnamese Buddhist School.

Thiền Trúc Lâm School and the *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*

All three major Zen schools in Vietnam with origins in China, namely Tỳ-ni-đa-lưu-chi, Vô Ngôn Thông, and Thảo Đường, presented above indicate a directed connection with the Thiền Trúc Lâm School. Therefore, we can imagine that the role of Chinese Ch’an influence is extremely important for its formation in Vietnam. Nguyen Tu Cuong commented, “Trúc Lâm Zen was principally a form of high-culture Buddhism for aristocrats” because it was viewed by the kings of the Tran dynasty as an ideal way in which to enjoy life and to become a spiritual leader after abdicating the throne to the next king.⁴³ The motif of “transmission of the lamp” or “mind-seals” is a practice of Chinese Ch’an tradition. This motif was also an ideal for these schools of Zen in Vietnam, including the Thiền Trúc Lâm School.⁴⁴

In sum, we cannot conclude that the Thiền Trúc Lâm School that was established by the Vietnamese king is purely Vietnamese. Although Vietnamese people founded the Thiền Trúc Lâm School, it was modeled after the Chinese Zen tradition with local modification in terms of language and local interpretation. How so? Let’s us explore the text of *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú* in terms of language and philosophical doctrines.

According to *Thơ Văn Lý Trần*⁴⁵, a collection of poetry and writings of the Ly and Tran dynasty included about 32 poems and 22 diplomatic letters to the Emperor Yuan of China, along

⁴¹ Thích Thiền An, *Buddhism and Zen in Vietnam in Relation to the Development of Buddhism in Asia*, (Los Angeles: College of Oriental Studies, Graduate School, 1975), 73.

⁴² Nguyen Lang, *Viet Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, 143.

⁴³ Nguyen Tu Cuong, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 20-21.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 20.

⁴⁵ Viên Văn Học, *Thơ Văn Lý Trần (Poetry and Writing of Lý-Trần)*, Vol.2, (Hanoi: NXB Khoa Học và Xã Hội, 1977), 451-552.

with other writings. *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phu* is one of such poems, and we can examine this piece of literature to explore influences from Chinese Ch'an traditions.

As I mentioned above, “cư trần lạc đạo” means to enjoy practicing Dharma while living in the ordinary mundane world. In other words, this statement emphasizes that Vietnamese Buddhism is not separated from normal life. This reflects the concept of “ordinary mind as the Way,” that is, an adoption of Chinese Ch'an tradition. In chapter 3 of the *phú*, the author reaffirmed this philosophy:

參 李 羅 惹 舍 諳 晦 隊 機 馬 祖

“*Buddha is the Mind*,”⁴⁶ and so one should learn the practices of Master Mā-Tổ.⁴⁷

In general, the *phu* was written in Chu Nom (Chinese logographic script); the central idea is a replica of Mazu's theory of “Buddha is Mind” from Chinese Ch'an, *phú* is a genre-rhymed prose that originated from China. All of these are “Sinic factors.” Only the author, few vocabulary⁴⁸, and pronunciation are Viet-factors. Again, it is very hard to accept the concept of the Thiền Trúc Lâm School as “pure” Vietnamese Buddhism.

Another example is the metaphors that the author used in the *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*. For instance, there were only three Vietnamese metaphors, namely “Cánh Diều Yên Tử” and “Sạn Hut and East Mount,” mentioned in chapter 3. The rest of metaphors are from Chinese Buddhism. For example, there are 32 metaphors in chapter 9⁴⁹ alone; they are all Chinese Ch'an historic metaphors, and none is Vietnamese. How can we conclude that this is an “*authentic*” Vietnamese Buddhist tradition with such obvious Chinese influences (100% Chinese factors in chapter 9 alone)?

For Vietnamese scholars, this text is a crystallized work of King Trần Nhân Tông, a philosophical core of the Thiền Trúc Lâm School and a “political ideology” to guide the kingdom during the period when King Trần Nhân Tông served as the King.⁵⁰ Many Vietnamese scholars, including Thich Phuoc Dat in his Ph.D dissertation and Nguyen Dinh Chu in his Ph.D dissertation, have frequently cited this statement. It became a standard for Vietnamese Buddhist scholars as a

⁴⁶ “即心即佛, *jixin jiffo*, tức tâm tức Phật, Mind is the Buddha” This is one of the doctrines of Ch'an Master Mazu Daoyi (709-788) in China. See Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage*, 65-76.

⁴⁷ Mā Tổ (Mazu) was the founder of Hongzhou Ch'an School, which was established during Tang dynasty (618-907) of China. See Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage*, 65.

⁴⁸ For example, “long” or “But” instead of “tam” and “Phat” in Sino-Vietnamese.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 9 of my translation and notes.

⁵⁰ This is Le Manh That's statement in his book *Toan Tap Trần Nhân Tông [Complete Collection of Trần Nhân Tông]*, Ibid, 8.

“*thuần túy*” Vietnamese Buddhism. Thích Nhất Hạnh perceives this text as “the heart” of the Thiền Trúc Lâm School in terms of philosophy and Buddhist practice in his Vietnamese book, *Trái Tim Của Trúc Lâm Đại Sĩ*.⁵¹ I found no comment or even mention of this text by Western scholars including notable works by Taylor⁵² and Whitmore.⁵³ This text contains many “Chinese factors” that reflect the inevitable phenomenon in Sinic-Viet contact especially since Vietnam was occupied by Chinese dynasties for more than one thousand years.

With respect to the philosophical doctrines, let us explore the core philosophy of Thiền Trúc Lâm School by examining the conclusion verse in *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*:

居塵樂道且隨緣,

饑則飧兮困則眠。

家中有寶休尋覓,

對境無心莫問禪。

*Dwelling in the world with the Joy of Practicing the Dharma,
let it flow with its conditions.*

When hungry then eat! When tired, so sleep then!

Treasures in the home, suspending the search,

Facing situation with no-mind!⁵⁴ What inquiring Thiền⁵⁵ for!

First concept of Thiền Trúc Lâm School is “隨緣” or *tuy duyên* is “flow with conditions.” This concept parallels “隨處作主 - tùy xứ tác chủ” of the Linji Zen School⁵⁶ in China, which means

⁵¹ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Trái Tim của Trúc Lâm Đại Sĩ [The Heart of Trúc Lâm Đại Sĩ]*, (Ho Chi Minh City: NXB Phương Đông, 2016).

⁵² K. W Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁵³ J.K. Whitmore et al, eds. *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁵⁴ “無心 or vô tâm the doctrine of no-mind. 念停 (Nôm), *niệm dừng* (Vietnamese), or “No-Mind” or “No-Thought” is a famous doctrine in Ch’an tradition. No-Mind means no preoccupation by any minds or thoughts. See William Barrett, “Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki,” (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), 157-226.

⁵⁵ Thiền is Zen, Chan, *Dhyana*, or Meditation. See note 2 in Chapter 1 of the translation of the *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*.

⁵⁶ Master Linji Yixuan (787- 886) was the founder of the Linji Zen School (*Rinzai* in Japanese). This school continues to serve the Zen community today including Japan and Vietnam. See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 155 -161.

having awareness to be mastered in any situations. Notice that Linji Zen came to Vietnam during this time and its influence on Zen of Vietnam was very strong. Second, the “無心, or vô tâm - *wuxin* – mind of emptiness” is another important element in the Thiền Trúc Lâm School. No-Mind means no-thoughts or no-notions; we do not need a single thought to conceptualize the world because the world exists by itself. With or without the thoughts, the world exists as it is. It is a process of deconceptualization or *sunyata* in Buddhism. Liberation or freedom from all concepts is the highest value in Buddhism or *nirvana*. In Vietnamese, it is called *niết bàn*, a form of freedom and happiness. With reference to freedom, in the very first line of *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*, Trần Nhân Tông used the term of “rõi”⁵⁷ which means that the core practice of a Thiền practitioner is freedom. Third, the concept of “Buddha is Mind” reflects in terms of “家中有寶, or gia trung hữu bảo - treasures in the home.”⁵⁸ This is central concept of Chinese Ch’an Buddhism. Thich Nhat Hanh concluded that the Linji School came to Vietnam with the concept of “No-Mind” and that it greatly influenced Vietnamese Buddhism during this time.⁵⁹ Again, I can refute the argument of the Thiền Trúc Lâm School is a “pure or thuần túy” form of Vietnamese Buddhism because the “Chinese factors” are always dominant everywhere in this Thiền school.

Before concluding, I would like to sum up the basic teachings of the Buddha. The cosmological view in Buddhism relies on the view of *prattiyasamutpada* or dependent origination. Phenomena manifest with that as its base (i.e., this is because that is); therefore, there is no intrinsic nature (*anatman* or non-self) of a thing [in order to differentiate with other thing] but things exist in a continuum of changing (impermanence) of co-existing factors. Without notions and labels, the world functions as it is; thus, peace, non-discrimination, or non-duality (as no notions of “self” and “others”) is possible. Given this aspect of *interbeing* or co-existence, there is no such a thing as “pure” Buddhist tradition when it emerged into any society. Therefore, there is no a *thuần túy* or pure of Vietnamese Buddhism, but it is a “localized” Buddhism of Vietnam. In other words, the process of localization of Buddhism has lacquered giving a new face of Vietnam Buddhism as a “cocktail” Buddhism rather than a “pure” Buddhist form.

Conclusion

⁵⁷ Le Manh That, *Toan Tap Trần Nhân Tông*, 344.

⁵⁸ “即心即佛, *jixin jiffo*, tức tâm tức Phật, Mind is the Buddha.” This is one of the doctrines of Ch’an Master Mazu Daoyi (709-788) in China. See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 65-76.

⁵⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Viet Nam Phat Giao Su Luan*, 300.

For decades, many Vietnamese Buddhist scholars have argued that Vietnamese Buddhism reflects a “pure” unadulterated form of Vietnamese Buddhism.⁶⁰ However, based on the analysis of the historical genesis of Vietnamese Zen and the famous but yet untranslated historical text *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*, I argue that Vietnamese Buddhism, specifically Vietnamese Zen, is a composite, cocktail version. Based on the sense of nationalism, most Buddhist Vietnamese scholars tried to *de-Sinicize* Vietnamese Buddhism with the intention of uplifting Vietnamese Buddhism because the Vietnamese people had endured “Chinese rules” for more than a millennium. In fact, when King Trần Nhân Tông of the Trần dynasty established the Trúc Lâm Zen School in the fourteenth century, the majority of Vietnamese people quickly conceived this school to be a “genuine” or “pure” Vietnamese Buddhist Zen school. Scholars have subsequently supported this notion. Perhaps it simply reflects the view that the Trúc Lâm Zen School is an example of the intention of Vietnamese to form an “independent” identity for the Vietnamese.

With such a long term of Chinese dominance and influence, it should not be surprising that Thiền Trúc Lâm School incorporated many Sinic factors including language, philosophical concepts, and genre of poetry. Even the ritual of certifying achieving enlightenment (đắc pháp) as “transmission of the lamp” borrows from Chinese Ch’an Buddhist practice. One thousand years in Chinese rules, it is normal that “Chinese factors” emerged in people’s mentality. Stephen O’Harrow at the University of Hawai’i commented that Vietnamese people react angrily if one questions him/her about the facts of borrowing Chinese cultural factors [language, religion, or model of politics], but in the reality, s/he uses “Chinese values” as his or her own “property” in their own way of life.⁶¹ This observation means that some elements of Chinese culture have become a “natural portion” of their culture.

One can observe the strong Sinic influence in the literary text investigated in this paper, the *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*. This *phú* was composed in Chinese genre and in Chu Nôm (a Chinese based logographic script), and it included numerous Chinese metaphors. Excluding the facts that 1) Trần Nhân Tông was a Vietnamese and 2) the text was composed on Vietnamese soil, the *phú* was heavily influenced by Sinic factors. However, Vietnamese scholars often easily put this aside and embrace it as “thuần túy or pure” Vietnamese Buddhist text. It is true that Vietnamese Buddhism is made by non-Vietnamese elements to form the Vietnamese Buddhism. This process

⁶⁰ At least from the first time when Tran Van Giap discovered the text of *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* [Compendium of Outstanding Figures of the Zen Garden] in 1927. See Nguyen Tu Cuong, “Rethinking Vietnamese Buddhist History,” 82-83.

⁶¹ See Stephen, O’Harrow, “Nguyen Trai’s Binh Ngo Dai Cao of 1428: The Development of a Vietnamese Identity,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 10, 1 (1979): 159-74.

reflects the core teaching of the Buddha – the *pratiyasamutpada* or *dependent origination*; thus, everything is *interbeing*.

By refuting the argument that the Thiền Trúc Lâm School is a “pure” Vietnamese Buddhist Zen School, I do not intend to devalue its role in shaping the philosophy of *Cư trần lạc đạo* – Dwelling in the World with the Joy of Practicing the Dharma – of this school. This is a form of “engaged Buddhism” in Vietnam, a term that Thích Nhất Hạnh coined during the Vietnam/American War. Engaged Buddhism means that Buddhist teachings are not reserved for any particular cohort, but are for everybody, and it means engagement with everyday living, the mundane existence of life. There is nothing wrong if Chinese Ch’an Buddhism influenced Vietnamese Buddhism. It is simply the process of localization, and as long as the Buddhist values of compassion, peace, and nonviolence are promoted and endorsed for reduction of suffering and for liberation for its practitioners. Then, it does not matter what label is attached to the term Buddhism or even using the word of “Buddhism” is not useful at all for any purpose.

English Translation of the *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*

Dwelling in the World with the Joy of Practicing the Dharma⁶²

居塵樂道賦

Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú

By King Trần Nhân Tông⁶³

⁶² 樂道, or lạc đạo; literally, “đạo” is “the Path.” Path means the Dharma because the teaching of the Buddha has the capacity to lead to liberation, enlightenment, and nirvana. The word “Đạo” still remains in many Vietnamese translations including Lê Mạnh Thát in his book, *Toàn Tập Trần Nhân Tông or A Complete Collection of Trần Nhân Tông*, Thích Nhất Hạnh in his book of “Trái Tim của Trúc Lâm Đại Sĩ (or The Heart of the Great Teach of Trúc Lâm)”, (Ho Chi Minh City: Nhà Xuất Bản Phương Đông, 2016), and in “*Thơ Văn Lý Trần or Collection on Poetry and Writing of Ly-Trần Dynasties*” of Institute of Literature. However, in this English translation, I translate the term of “Đạo” as “Practicing of Dharma.”

⁶³ 安子山第一祖竹林頭陀淨慧覺皇調御主佛, or An Tử Sơn Đệ Nhất Tổ Trúc Lâm Đầu Đà Tịnh Tuệ Giác Hoàng Điều Ngự Chủ Phật, or The First Patriarch of Trúc Lâm Yên Tử, the Tamer of Men, the Renunciator [*Dhuranga*], the

Chapter 1

Body is in the town,
Behavior is in the manner of mountain and forest being one.

Half-day practicing freedom⁶⁴, all actions are suspended and our True Nature is at peace.
When the source of craving and attachment stops,

Then we no longer think of desire, of jewelry, and of gems.
When the voice of argument of right and wrong is suspended, there is plentiful occasion to listen to the birds' singing.

Enjoying the beauty of clear water or hiding in green mountains, how many are able to be satisfied with this?
Knowing the nature of cherry blossoms and green willows, how many are able to understand?

The clear sky and the bright moon, shining on all rivers of Thiền.⁶⁵
The sun of wisdom shines on all living beings to bloom beautiful flowers and to green tender willows.

King –Buddha, Tịnh Tuệ” is the title of King Trần Nhân Tông (陳仁宗). This title printed in the front page as the author of the text instead of Trần Nhân Tông.

⁶⁴ 来(Nôm), *rời* a native form of speaking in Vietnamese to express the concept of *freedom*, not a political freedom but a notion of “free of attachments.” Freedom is “tự-do” in Sino-Vietnamese; but in this case, the author used “rời” to express the notion of freedom, an aspect of *nirvana*, with the intention of using Vietnamese words rather than borrowing from Sino-Vietnamese. Philosophically and literally, *nirvana* is a practice of extinction notions or perceptions in order to experience *things* as it is.

⁶⁵ 禪,Thiền (Vietnamese), Chan in Chinese, and Zen in Japanese. This term is coined from *dhyana* – mediation. See Suzuki, D.T., *Zen Buddhism: An Introduction*, (New York: Grove Press), 32-37.

Changing-bones and flying high, thus people want this elixir.⁶⁶

Craving to prolong life and go to Heaven, thus people seek the immortal medicine.⁶⁷

Loving the *nature of clarity*⁶⁸ is more precious than gems.

Relaxing, reciting sutras, appreciating the nature of *freedom* more than gold.

Chapter 2

Knowing that,

There is only one Dharma, which is the practice for *freedom* of mind.

Maintaining the *nature of clarity*, one might experience peace.

Refraining the rise of all wrong perceptions,⁶⁹ thus they are suspended

Suspending the notion of “self” and “persons,” thus the true nature of diamond is manifested.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Immortality is a target of the Daoist, thus they want to have the elixir and immortal medicine. The whole point of Daoist goal is to prolong human life as “immortality.” For this point, please consult the book of N.J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism: The Theme of Chaos (hun-tun)*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 42. The author tried to compare the goal of a Daoist as “immortality” versus Thiền (Buddhist Zen) practitioner as “*nature of clarity*.” We can notice here that Daoism is rooted in Vietnamese culture as well, and later in the text, the author continued to use the Confucian concepts. The “whole package” of Chinese religion was localized and adopted into Vietnamese culture as well.

⁶⁷ The elixir is the immortal medicine. The rhymed prose keeps repeating some terms that share same meaning.

⁶⁸ 性朗 (Nôm): *tính sáng*, nature of clarity, a native form speaking to illustrate the concept of *wisdom* (*Prajñā* in Sanskrit; *míng-xìng* 明性 in Chinese; and in Sino-Vietnamese is “*minh tính*”). Again, the author tried to “de-Sinicize” Vietnamese literature by generating a Vietnamese Buddhist term rather than borrowing directly the form of *minh tính* from the Chinese root.

⁶⁹ 念妄 (Nôm), *niệm vọng* is native speaking form in Vietnamese (*vọng niệm*, *wrong perception*, is in Sino-Vietnamese form).

⁷⁰ “nhân or person” and “ngã or self” are two of four notions (the other two are included notions of living beings (*chúng sanh*) and lifespan (*thọ giả*) in the Diamond Sutra in Mahayana Buddhism. This sutra emphasizes the

Ending greed and anger, thus, the mind of fully enlightenment appears.⁷¹

Pure Land is the pure mind, there is no wondering about which is the Western Paradise.

Amitabha is the shining *nature of clarity*, why [are you] still looking exhaustedly for the Land of Ultimate Joy?⁷²

concepts of dependent origination. The formula that “A is made up from non-A factors that is the true A.” A person is made up a lot of “non-person” elements such as water, food, air, etc., to construct an entity called “person.” The self is constructed by many other non-self-factors to become that “self.” Because “here is the left”, therefore one could determine “the right is over there.” In this sutra, in order to experience the reality of phenomena, one should practice suspending all notions or labels that pre-occupy the mind. For a further detailed explanation, consult the book by Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Diamond that Cuts Through Illusion: Commentaries on the Prajñāparamita Diamond Sutra*, (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 1992).

⁷¹ 圓覺(Sino-Vietnamese), *viên-giác*, fully enlightenment. This is a goal of a Buddhist. The Fully Enlightenment is the of title of the Buddha.

⁷² 西方(Sino-Vietnamese), *Tây-Phương*: Western Paradise; and 極樂(Sino-Vietnamese), *Cực-Lạc*: Land of Ultimate of Joy. Two of these terms are described as being in one place that is called the Pure Land (of the *Amitabha* Buddha). According to the *Longer Sukhavatuvyuha Sutra* (in Sanskrit), or *Da Amitoufo Jing*, 大阿彌陀經 (in Chinese), and/or “The Great Amitābha Buddha Sūtra” (in English), the Amitabha Buddha is ruling and preaching the Dharma in the Pure Land. If one desires to be born in that Pure Land after death, he or she must recite the name and worship the name of Amitabha Buddha. It is a basic belief of the school of Pure Land Buddhism, a branch of Mahayana Buddhism that emerged around the 2nd century CE. The author emphasized that the Amitabha Buddha is the nature of awakening or awareness in the human mind, thus we need not look for it in the future; that is a waste of time.

Contemplating in the body and the mind, cultivating the *nature of awakening*,⁷³
No need to wait for the accomplishment to show off to others.

Practicing the precepts and virtues⁷⁴ to face the nature of *impermanence*,⁷⁵ it is not an action for trading fame or advertising/marketing to sell it to others.

Eating vegetables and fruits, the mouth is not afraid of about either spicy or bitter foods.
Wearing coarse clothes, the body does not care whether they are in black or in white.

Living joyfully with virtuous morality, even living in a half-size straw-hut, what preciousness,
being more than the kingdom of Heaven.

Knowing *benevolence* and *righteousness*,⁷⁶ even when there is roof with three tiles; it is more favorable than a mansion.

Chapter 3

⁷³ 性識 (Nôm), *tính thức* (Vietnamese), the nature of awakening or the nature of understanding. It is a purpose of meditation. The true Zen practitioner is the one who meditates for concentration (*Samadhi*) to achieve the nature of understanding (*prajna* or wisdom). Meditation is a way of practicing self-cultivation; there is no need to prove or show off to someone else.

⁷⁴ 戒行 (Nôm), *giới hạnh*, or *Sila* in Sanskrit, Sila [the Precept] is one of training in the Three Fold Training in Buddhism (including *Sila*, *Samadhi*, and *Prajna*).

⁷⁵ 無常 (Nôm), *vô-thường*, impermanence or *Anicca* (in Pali), one of the Three Marks of Dharma or Three Dharma Seals.

⁷⁶ 仁, *Nhân* or *benevolence*, and 義 *ngĩa* or *righteousness*, these are Confucian qualities to form a great person in Chinese philosophy. These factors compose the entire value of a human. See David L. Hall, and, Roger T. Ames *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1998), 31-35.

If one attends the View⁷⁷, then all wrongdoings are extinct.
All trainings are thoroughly understood.

Keeping the *nature of clarity* present to avoid the wrong paths.
Perfecting the trainings in alignment with Dharma.

Buddha is the Mind,⁷⁸ and so one should learn the practices of Master Mã-Tổ.⁷⁹
Renouncing money and sex, so one should learn the manners of living of Bàng Công.⁸⁰

Because of the presence of *nature of clarity*, there is no desire for self-benefit;
But not because of residing at Cánh Điều Yên Tử.⁸¹

⁷⁷ 谷, *cóc*, a native form of saying “biết or thấy, realize or view.” In this context, “*cóc*” means the View, the Right View in The Eightfold Path in Buddhism. See note on “right view” in Chapter 7, or in “Samyukta Agama No. 301,” where the Buddha explained directly about how he rationalized this term. See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book* (California, Berkeley: 2000), 237-238.

⁷⁸ “即心即佛, *jixin jiffo*, tức tâm tức Phật, Mind is the Buddha” This is a doctrine of Ch’an Master Mazu Daoyi (709-788) in China. See Ferguson, “*Zen’s Chinese Heritage*,” 65-76.

⁷⁹ Mã Tổ (Mazu) was the founder of Hongzhou Ch’an School, which was established during Tang dynasty (618-907) of China. See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 65.

⁸⁰ 龐公 (Nôm), Bàng Công (Pang Yun): A famous lay Zen Buddhist in Chinese Zen. He practiced and realized enlightenment under Zen Master Mazu Daoyi. See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 94-95.

⁸¹ A name of a Monastery in Mt. Yen Tu where King Trần Nhân Tông established his Thiền Trúc Lâm Buddhist School.

Because *deconceptualization*⁸² is present, therefore the sounds and forms are eliminated,
But not because of sitting in meditation at Sạn Hut or East Mount.⁸³

Even dwelling in the dusty world, we can attain success if we practice wholeheartedly cherishing that happiness.

Living in the mountain for practicing Dharma but not attending the enlightenment⁸⁴ means the catastrophe of a waste life.

Making aspirations to live next the skillful teachers,⁸⁵ the fruit of Bodhi might ripen in one night. The happiness of meeting good friends, the flower of *Udumbara*⁸⁶ might bloom in few lifespans.

Chapter 4

Believing that,

Whenever one experiences one-mindedness,⁸⁷ then one is free from all sorrows.

⁸²念停 (Nôm), *niệm dừng* (Vietnamese), or "No-Mind" or "No-Thought" is a famous doctrine in the Ch'an tradition. No-Mind means no preoccupation by any minds or thoughts. See Barrett, "Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki, 157-226.

⁸³ These are names of Buddhist Temples in Mt. Yen Tu (Bắc Ninh Province, in the north of present-day Vietnam).

⁸⁴ 谷, *cốc*, or enlightenment.

⁸⁵ In Sino-Vietnamese, it is "minh sư" – a "bright teacher" literally. I translate it into "the skillful teacher."

⁸⁶ *Udumbara* is the name of a mystical of flower that will bloom for each 3000 years. When the Shakyamuni Buddha was born, this flower bloomed as a good sign of a Great Being's manifestation.

⁸⁷ 蕙瑟 (Nôm), *một lòng* (Vietnamese), The author adapted the term "*nhất tâm*" (Sino-Vietnamese), or 一心, *yixin* (in Chinese), which means "one mind" – a state of concentration in meditation. Whenever the zen practitioner meditates on something, he or she can achieve the state of "one mind" on that subject without distraction. Again, the author tried to de-Sinicize this wording by adopting and translating the term into the native form of speaking rather than borrowing directly from Chinese form.

Transforming the *three poisons*,⁸⁸ so experiencing the *three bodies*.⁸⁹

If one wants to cut-off the foundations of the six sense⁹⁰, one must eliminate the six objects of senses.⁹¹

Finding ways for changing-bones,⁹² there is only the way to elaborate the elixir.

In practicing *true emptiness*,⁹³ one does not fear attachments to sounds and forms.

By realizing the *suchness*,⁹⁴ believing in *Prajna*,

⁸⁸ 三毒, *Tam độc*, or three poisons: craving, anger, and ignorance are considered to be the three poisons for the Buddhist because they interfere with the mind and in daily life. They also cause conflicts that prevent the practitioner of Zen from achieving enlightenment.

⁸⁹ 三身, *tam thân*, or the Three bodies of Buddha, a doctrine of Mahayana Buddhism. These bodies are 1) Dharmakaya (Body of Dharma): the essence of enlightenment, 2) Sambhogakaya (Body of Bliss), and 3) Nirmanakaya (Physical Body). Each Buddha is included in these three manifested bodies, which are emphasized in the *Lotus Sutra* literature. See Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Buddha's Teachings*, 156-160.

⁹⁰ 六根, *Lục căn*, or the six sense bases, include eyes, ears, tongue, noses, body, and mind.

⁹¹ 六賊, *Lục tặc*, or the six objects of senses include form, sound, smell, touch, taste, and all phenomena.

⁹² The metaphor illustrates the immortality in Daoism. See note in Chapter 1.

⁹³ 真空, *Chân không*, or true emptiness (*sunyata* in Sanskrit). This doctrine was first introduced by the Buddha in *Samyutta Nikaya*, and later on Nagarjuna – a Buddhist scholar who lived around 150 CE, and is analyzed in more detail in his work, *Mahaprajnaparamita Sastra*. See Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Buddha's Teachings*, 105-107.

⁹⁴ 真如, *chân như*, *Tathata* (in Sanskrit), this is a term from *Prajna* school. Literally, it means “thusness”, or “suchness.” D.T. Suzuki explained that it is as “facts of experience are accepted as they are.” If we see a flower, just simple there is a flower. See Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 36.

There is no need to find the Buddha and patriarchs in the West or the East.

By enlightening to true reality, and opening the door of effortlessness (*wuwei*),⁹⁵

There will be no need to inquire the sutras of the South or the North.

Reading the teachings in the three collections,⁹⁶ certainly the practice of the Zen-Garden and the Monastic Disciplines.⁹⁷

Knowing how to burn the five-elements-incense,⁹⁸ means there is no need to purchase expensive sandalwoods or fragrant flowers.

Cultivating love and righteousness, nurturing virtues,

Everyone considers the Shakyamuni Buddha.

Practicing the precepts and virtues, eliminating greed and jealousy,

般若, *Bát Nhã*, *Prajna* is *Mahaprajnaparamita* (above). Literally, it means the ultimate wisdom.

⁹⁵ 無為, *Vô vi*, (*wuwei* in Chinese) was adopted into Buddhist philosophy from Daoism (action of non-action), it illustrates the nature of effortlessness like the same notion of *tathata*. See above note of *chân như* or *tathata*.

⁹⁶ 三藏, *Ba-tạng*, or Tripitaka – The Three Baskets of Collection: *Sutras* (Buddha's sermons), *Sila* (Precepts), and *Abidharma* (Treatises).

⁹⁷ Baizhang Huahai, a foremost student of Master Mazu (see above) who compiled *The Zen Principles of Po-chang Master* (*Bách Trượng Thanh Quy* in Vietnamese) a famous work of Chinese Ch'an monastic regulations with a very strong discipline of "no working one day, no eating one day!" See Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage*, 77-82.

⁹⁸ 五分香, *Ngũ phần hương*, it is a metaphor referring to a kind of incense, that includes five factors of precepts, concentration, wisdom, freedom, and liberation of all intellectual knowledge. All of these characters produce this incense, which is considered to be the best quality to offer to the Buddha.

That is a true Maitreya⁹⁹.

Chapter 5

So knowing,

The *Buddha is in the house*, no need to go searching afar.

Because if we forget the roots,

Then we search for the Buddha, forgetting *we are the Buddha*.¹⁰⁰

Speaking a few sentences of Zen,

We are already relaxing, lying in homeland of Hà-Hữu.¹⁰¹

Reading sutras a few times,

⁹⁹ The Buddha to be. Both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism hold the belief in a Buddha to be whose name is *Maitreya*.

¹⁰⁰ "Buddha is in the house" or "We are the Buddha" re-illustrates again the doctrine of "即心即佛, *jixin jiffo*, tức tâm tức Phật, or Mind is the Buddha" of Zen Master Mazu in chapter 3. See above. Literally, the term "Buddha" means the awakened one or the ability of being enlightened.

¹⁰¹ 何有 (Hà-Hữu), is a metaphor of a "true home" in Zhuangzi 's poem "*Xiāoyáo yóu*, 逍遙遊 or *Easy and Free Wondering*." In this poem, Zhuangzi (a Chinese philosopher who lived about 4th century BCE during the Warring State Period of Chinese history) emphasized an idealistic free-care figure for those who want to enjoy a hermit life. See Xiaogan Liu, *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy*, (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2015) 201-202. The true home is a place free of all anxieties, "無何有之鄉."

We are already sitting freely in the state of Tân-La.¹⁰²

Living in the meaning of Dharma, we create more skillful practices.¹⁰³

So that we are already living in the environment of the sutras and the patriarchs.

Not participating in argument of wrong and right, preventing intervention of the forms and sounds,

Means not engaging in activities of sexual misconduct.

The virtue of the Buddha is compassion, thus we vow to live near him in numerous lifetimes.

The grace of Nghiêu¹⁰⁴ is great because of exempting all taxes for the monks.

Clothes and blankets are enough for seasonal needs even though simple or mended.

Rice or rice-soup for feeling full, be it new rice or old rice.

¹⁰² 新羅 or *Tân-La*, 신라 (in Korean), or Silla, in Korea, the world's longest dynasty (a. 59 BC – 935 AD). Buddhism arrived around the 6th century and it became a major political and social force for Korean people. It became a metaphor for a country where is peace and happiness because of the practice of Buddhism.

¹⁰³ Including the *koan* – this is a way of using a word or a phrase to help the Zen practitioner to enlighten. The author used the word “cơ quan” to illustrate “koan” in this sentence.

¹⁰⁴ Vua Nghiêu, or *Emperor Yao* (帝堯), a legendary emperor of ancient China; accordingly, under his regime, people had a very happy life because of his generosity. This reign became a metaphor in Vietnamese literature. The kings of Vietnam used it as a model of rule for their polity. For instance, the kings of the Tran Dynasty used the “Nghiêu, Yao” for their royal title; and the King Trần Nhân Tông's title was Hiến Nghiêu Quang Thánh Thái Thượng Hoàng - 憲堯光聖太上皇帝.

Protect the eight consciousnesses,¹⁰⁵ stop the eight winds,¹⁰⁶
The more we repress the more they doubly rebound.

Open the *three mystic doors*¹⁰⁷, widen the *three essences*,¹⁰⁸
Then we need to chop into small pieces as well as to grind slowly.

Even though the lute has no strings, we can still play the piece of melody *no-birth no death*.¹⁰⁹
Even though the flute has no holes, we can still play the song of Great Peace.

Digging the roots to search for the branches is a pitiful action of Master Câu-Chi.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ The Eight consciousness: Eyes consciousness, ears consciousness, tongue consciousness, touch consciousness, nose consciousness, mind consciousness, mana-consciousness (ego or self), and storehouse consciousness (alaya). The school of Mind-Only (Duy Thức Tông or *Vijñānavāda*) emphasizes this doctrine that our mind functions on the base of these eight consciousness. See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Understanding our Mind*, (California: Parallax Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁶ 八風, Bát phong, or Eight kinds of winds include prosperity, decline, honor, disregard, praise, censure, pleasure, and suffering. These factors interfere with the human mind, and they are conceptualized as the obstacles to the way of enlightenment.

¹⁰⁷ 三玄, Tam-huyền (Linji teachings): 1) the essence of phenomena, 2) word, and 3) skillful means or *upaya* – including shouting and striking.

¹⁰⁸ 三要, Tam yếu (Linji teachings): 1) Dharma or teaching/doctrines, 2) wisdom, and 3) skillful means.

¹⁰⁹ 無生, Vô sinh, or “no birth, no death” is a central cosmological idea in Buddhism, it relies on the concept of “*prattiyasamutpada* – dependent origination.” Because all phenomena are manifested on the base of interdependence, nothing is born or dies.

¹¹⁰ 俱胝, Câu Chi or Master Juzhi, a Chinese Zen Master who lived in the 9th century. He went to study with many Zen masters but he could not understand what Zen’s essence was. Once day, he met a monk, and he shared his

Turning to look for his own head in the mirror is a silly story of Diễn-Nhã-Đạt-Đa.¹¹¹

Creep through a ring of diamonds, and this action does not make a hero feels anxious.
Swallow whole a thorny chestnut, so that there no need to worry if hands have a scratch on the skin.

Chapter 6

That is true,
Practicing *no-mind*¹¹² is the right Path¹¹³.

sadness in spending time to study Zen, and that monk raised a finger. Then he realized the enlightenment. Then, he used this way for the Zen practitioners, and it became a famous *koan* of “raising up his finger” whenever somebody inquired his teaching and asked “what is Zen?”

¹¹¹ 演若達多 *Enyadatta* or Diễn Nhã Đạt Đa is a name of a man in *Sūraṅgama Sūtra* (Sanskrit) or 大佛頂首楞嚴經 - Đại Phật Đảnh Thủ Lăng Nghiêm, he saw his head in the mirror; however, when he turned away from the mirror, he did not see his head anymore, and ran into the village to look for it. The head represents the Buddha nature or enlightenment, it is always there, but people continue to look for it from outside. The author tried to emphasize again the idea of “Buddha is Mind, 即心即佛, *jixin jiffo*, tức tâm tức Phật” of Zen Master Mazu in chapter 3. See above.

¹¹² 無心, vô tâm, or No-mind (see above on Chapter 3).

¹¹³ 道, đạo, or Path, the path to nirvana or enlightenment. Mahayana Buddhism in China used to borrow this term (dao) in Daoism to illustrate the term of “Buddhism or the Way of the Buddha” for the local Chinese audience because Daoism had established in Chinese mentality before Buddhism came. Chinese Buddhist scholars tend to borrow native religion’s terms for sake of acceptance and conceptualization by the local population. The Vietnamese borrowed this usage in their language and literature as well.

If the three karmas¹¹⁴ are calm, then the body and mind are calm.
Attend *one-mindedness*,¹¹⁵
then we are now able to understand the teachings of Patriarchs.

Read letters for anticipating meanings,¹¹⁶
It is wrong! Thus, Zen practitioners may still be desolate and lonely.
*In directing experience*¹¹⁷ of the Dharma, the Zen practitioner must be stable and skillful.

Inquiring the leakage and non-leakage,¹¹⁸
One should know that the silk-sifter leaks and the coconut-shell ladle contains.
Inquiring of what Mahayana or Hinayana is,
Straightforward speaking: It is a cord for beading all corns or a cord for water bucket at the well.

By recognizing the presence of the clarity nature of mind,
There is no worry about the weather or conditions.
If you clean the clarity nature of mirror,
How the sense bases and the objects of senses disturb us?

Gold with contaminated ore must be molded and forged nine times still.

¹¹⁴ 三業, tam-nghiệp (Sino-Vietnamese) or three forms of karma: 1) karmas of bodily action, 2) karmas of speeches, and 3) karmas of thoughts.

¹¹⁵ See note of 22 on chapter 4.

¹¹⁶ 認文解義, *Nhận văn giải nghĩa* (Sino-Vietnamese) means that seeing the letters and words for understanding the meaning is wrong in Zen culture. Sometimes, letters and words are considered as skillful means that help the Zen practitioner to achieve the enlightenment.

¹¹⁷ 証理知機 or *Chứng lý tri cơ* means to understand the reasoning and the purpose of using *koan* (letters, words, or striking/hitting) to experience the reality. Thus, I translate this phrase as “direct experience” but not get caught in the letters, words, or striking. Understanding the true essence of the skillful mean rather than its expression.

¹¹⁸ 有漏, *Hữu lậu* or *leakage* and 無漏, *Vô lậu* or *non-leakage* are the Buddhist terms to express the concepts of conventional truth (leakage) as “common sense” and absolute truth (non-leakage) as “the fact”. Buddhist philosophy holds the belief of two truths. For fully explanation, see Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction*, 56-57.

If greed of wealth and benefits are extinct, then we just need simple vegetarian meals.

Purifying the essence of precepts,¹¹⁹ cleaning the manifestation of precepts,¹²⁰ are the internal and external adornments of a Bodhisattva.¹²¹

If the one-hearted serves the king, a filial one serves the parents,

Knowing when to proceed or when to stop, makes one a real royal hero with filial righteousness.¹²²

¹¹⁹ 戒悉: "giới lòng" is "戒體" or "giới thể" in Sino-Vietnamese, King Trần Nhân Tông used the Vietnamese native form of speaking "giới lòng" rather than Chinese form "giới thể." When the monk kneels down to receive the precept in the ordination ceremony, he receive the essence of precept (sila); it is more important than just the text of the precepts.

¹²⁰ 戒相 "giới tướng" (Sino-Vietnamese) means the text of the precepts. Some monastics pretend to be a monk but their mind is not truly that of a monk. Thus, from seeing, the monk obeys all the precepts but his mind is not pure, so this practice of precept is not a meaningful practice as a Buddhist monk.

¹²¹ The idea of Bodhisattva, a Buddha to be, is an important concept of idealistic of a Buddhist because he or she vows to reborn to serve living beings after achieving the enlightenment or *nirvana*. See Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, 140-142.

¹²² "Thờ vua or serving the King", "hiếu thảo Cha Mẹ or filial piety to parents", and "right manner of a truly man" are moral duties in Confucian values. The author emphasized and incorporated all factors of Confucianism into the

By selecting friends for the practice of Zen, even when this body disintegrates, it is hard to repay the gratitude to them.

By asking the permission from great masters for studying the Dharma, Even if bones are ground and brain liquefied, these doings are not equivalent to offering gratitude to them.¹²³

Chapter 7

Thus knowing,
The teachings of the Buddha is highly precious,
Only by practicing it, one might understand.

Ignorance is extinct, thus the Bodhi nature illuminates¹²⁴.
Sorrow is eliminated, virtue becomes more favorable.

Study the essence of sutras in order to understand what the Buddha taught.
Follow the practices of Patriarchs,
Then the *emptiness*¹²⁵ in Zen is not hard to understand.

Buddhist text. Why? Well, I think he was still a king or father of the king (after he gave his throne to his son), so this adaption has an obvious political reason.

¹²³ This is a common expression of gratitude to the teachers. The teacher is a very important figure in Vietnamese culture, the teacher not only teaches the students knowledge but he/she also teaches morality or way of living. This is reflected in the proverb of "*nhất tự vi sư bán tự vi sư*, or "whether the teachers taught half-word or a word, they are always the teachers."

¹²⁴ 菩提, *Bồ Đề*, or Bodhi means the Enlightenment; in this sense, Bodhi and Ignorance are interbeing, they are two manifestations of one entity.

¹²⁵ 空 (C: *kōng*), *Không* (*śūnyata* in Sanskrit), or the void, *emptiness*. This concept is a central doctrine of Madhyamaka school founder by Nagarjuna (a.150 CE) – an Indian monk. Ontologically, emptiness is empty of a concept of the certainty of a thing, or empty of a *svabhava* [or intrinsic nature] of a thing [a phenomenon or a

Go to the end of road when the sorrow detaches,
 Do not let it manifest itself even though it is small.
 Drop down the victorious flag; make full the insightful views¹²⁶,
 To empty the misfortune-causes even if it is small.

Use the flame of enlightenment to burn down the forest of wrong-views from the old days.
 Hold the sword of wisdom to sweep off the wrong perceptions from past to present day.

Be grateful to the Holy Ones, love the parents, and respect the Dharma teachers.
 Revere the Buddha, prevent greed from arising, practice precepts and eat vegetarian.

Appreciate His Compassion-Loving Kindness¹²⁷,
 Vow to live close to him in life after life.
 Grateful for His protection and support,
 Enduring even the suffering of crushing the body in thousand times in life after life.

Righteousness in mind, the Dharma remembered,
 The offering of incense and flower symbolizes filial piety.
 Saying belief but mind does not,
 Even offering golds or jewels does not reflect sincerity

dharma] which is used for differentiating *itself* versus other things. The famous text of *Prajnaparamita* explains this idea very detail, and the Zen tradition adopted it as a core teaching. In other words, there is empty of intrinsic nature to form a phenomenon because phenomena exist in the base of interdependence or *prattiyasamutpada*. See Sideritts, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, p. 180-207, and Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p.48-57; and Thich Nhat Hanh, *Zen Keys*, p.105-107.

¹²⁶ 圓知見, *viên tri kiến*, or right view – a path of The Noble Eightfold Paths in Buddhism: Right view (*Samma-ditthi*), Right Thought (*Samma-sankappa*), Right Speech (*Samma-vacca*), Right Action (*Samma-kammanta*), Right Livelihood (*Samma -ajiva*), Right Effort (*Samma- vayama*), Right Mindfulness (*Samma-sati*), and Right Concentration (*Samma-samadhi*).

¹²⁷ 慈悲, *tỳ bi*, or *maitri-karuna*, or compassion and sympathy are the virtues of the Buddha.

Chapter 8

So that,
the only way is practice. You should not stop learning!

Wake up the awareness, do not grasp unto attachments constantly.
Suspend all wrong perceptions, should not lead to restlessness.¹²⁸

Crave for fame and wealth, for those who are very ignorant.
Cultivate happiness and wisdom, which is the real wise man.

Build piers, bridges, stupas, or temples,
These are practices of the external adornments outside.
Cultivate loving-kindness and compassion, permeating empathetic joy and equanimity¹²⁹,
Recite the Heart-sutra¹³⁰ for more *internal freedom*.

Train one's mind for becoming the Buddha¹³¹, for it is only a diligent daily practice.
Eliminate sand for gold, as it requires many times of sorting and filtering.

¹²⁸ 觸觸, xóc xóc (Vietnamese) and 掉舉 (Chinese. *dào jǔ*), trạo cử (Sino-Vietnamese), the author tried to "Vietnamize" this terms in Nôm rather than Sino-Vietnamese. This factor is very significant for the Zen practitioner because the state of "restlessness" or "not being still" of mind interferes with our mind, and it becomes very hard to concentrate.

¹²⁹ 慈,悲,喜,捨 or *từ, bi, hỷ, xả*, or loving-kindness (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuna*), empathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (inclusiveness, *upekkha*) are four factors in the mind-heart of a Bodhisattva. It's called "the Four Immeasurable Minds, or Chinese: 四無量心, Sanskrit: *catvāryapramāṇāni*, and in Vietnamese: *Tứ vô lượng tâm*. See Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of The Buddha's Teaching*, p.169-175.

¹³⁰ The Heart Sutra is the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*; this sutra is chanted every morning and evening, and in some other Buddhist ceremonies in Vietnam and some other Mahayana Buddhism countries including China, Japan, and Korea. See Thich Nhat Hanh's translation in English in *Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book*, 15-16.

¹³¹ 煉心即佛 (Nôm) or "Rèn lòng làm Phật [training or practice the principle 'Mind is the Buddha']" again "tức tâm tức Phật" or "即心即佛, *jixin jiffo*, tức tâm tức Phật, Mind is the Buddha"

Read sutras and records, and make knowing and understanding equal.
Respect the Buddha and practice mindfulness of the body,
Do not disregard a small mistake even though it is small as a hair.

Do not worry about spending time to study the root of each word each letter,
Master the *skillful meanings of Zen*,¹³² do not let the eight notions¹³³ come in and out.

Chapter 9¹³⁴

Thus, we should know
whether the teaching of Patriarchs are various methods, but they are not much different.

If only by saying from the period of Zen master Mã Tổ¹³⁵, then one forgets the time of Tiêu Hoàng¹³⁶.

¹³² 機關 or “Cơ quan” literally, it means “method, mechanism, way, strategy, or tool.” In this Zen context, all methods and teachings have the same telos, which is to lead the Zen practitioners to enlightenment. These techniques consist of koan, shouting, striking, silence, etc., in Zen literature.

¹³³ 參禪, or *Tám hơi*, the eight notions – *birth, death, permanence, annihilation, coming, going, monism and pluralism*.

¹³⁴ In this chapter, the author uses more than thirty classical metaphors in Chinese Chan literature. He introduces most of famous *koans* and *dialogues* in Chan. In order to investigate Chinese Chan Buddhism, it requires a number years of research and study. In general, the emergence of Chan tradition was from Tang dynasty (618-907). See Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way*; Faure, Bernard, *The Will to Orthodoxy: A Critical Genealogy or Northern Chan Buddhism* Stanford University Press, 1997), and Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage*.

¹³⁵ Mazu (709-788), see note 16 on chapter 3.

¹³⁶ 蕭皇, Tiêu Hoàng (464–549), is 梁武帝, Liang Wudi (Lương Vũ Đế or Emperor Wu of Liang). He was a great supporter of Buddhism after he gained power. He interviewed Bodhidharma (the legendary first Patriarch of Chinese Chan, he was an Indian Buddhist monk) who came to spread the teaching of Buddha during the fifth

“No good deeds at all!”¹³⁷ The habit of attachment to ignorance creates more mistakes.
 “Not sacred!” “Don’t know!” The ignorant ears are capable of hearing only the sounds.

“Born in India, died in a Shaolin Temple¹³⁸, buried hastily underfoot Mount Xiong’Er,”¹³⁹
 “Body as Bodhi tree!” “The mind as bright mirror!”¹⁴⁰ The verse had raised and written on hallway wall.

century of Christian era. This dialogue became famous *koan* for many generations of Zen later. See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage* 15-16.

¹³⁷ In the dialogue between Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu of Liang, the Emperor asked: “I supported the Buddhism for building the temples, supporting monastics, and doing lot of charity for the poor, so do I gain some good deeds?” “No, no good deeds at all [功德全無]” Bodhidharma replied. The Emperor continued: “What is the first holly truth in the Four Noble Truth?” Bodhidharma said: “Absolute no sacred/holiness at all [廓然無聖]!”

Lastly, the Emperor asked, “Who is it that in front of me?” “I do not know [不識]!” Bodhidharma answered. After that, the Emperor was angry and he did not support him to teach Dharma in his state. All of these answers later became the *koans* for meditation. See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 15-16.

¹³⁸ The temple (少林寺 *Shaolin Sì*) is located in Dengfeng County, Henan Province, China. It was established during the fifth century Christian are. In 2010, UNESCO inscribed it as the World Heritage site. See “Historic Monuments of Dengfeng in ‘The Centre of Heaven and Earth’”, from UNESCO website at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1305>.

¹³⁹ Biography of Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of the Chinese Ch’an tradition who was born in India. He came to China for the teaching of Chan and he died at Shaolin Temple on Mountain Xiong ‘Er. See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 15-20.

¹⁴⁰ “身菩提, *thân Bồ đề*, or *Body as the Bodhi tree*” and “ 慧明鏡, *lòng minh kính*, or *the mind as the bright mirror*” are two metaphors in the insight verse of Zen Master Thần Tú, or *Shenxiu* - 神秀 (638-713), the sixth Patriarch of Chinese Chan Buddhism. Metaphor of Bodhi tree represents wisdom, or Tree of Wisdom; it refers to the fact that Prince Siddhartha attained his Full Enlightenment under the foot of Bodhi tree. See Ferguson, *Ibid*, 37-38. In Chan tradition, the master usually requests the monk to write a verse to express his insight or enlightenment. So, monk Shenxiu wrote this verse on a wall in the monastery instead on a piece of paper:

身是菩提樹
 心如明鏡臺

Vương - Lão¹⁴¹ chopped the cat! This action went through the mind of the Head of Sangha. Master Hồ¹⁴² warned people about angry dogs, to point out the immaturity of his students.

The price of rice at Linh Lăng market is too high, and does not allow for bargaining¹⁴³.

時時勤拂拭
勿使惹塵埃

*The body is the Bodhi tree,
Mind is like bright mirror
Polish it all the times,
Maintain undusted it.*

¹⁴¹ Vương Lão is another Chinese Zen Master Nanquan Puyuan or 南泉普願 (749-835), a student of Master Mazu. He is famous because of the koan of “Nanquan cuts the cat, or 南泉斬貓 (*Nam Tuyền trảm miu*).” One day, there were two monks who argued about the cat in monastic quarter; Nanquan came by and asked the situation. Then he held the cat and said: “Say something, if you cannot, I will chop the cat into two parts!” People got frightening from that saying. From that moment, the koan became famous in the Zen community.

¹⁴² 柴胡, Thầy Hồ or Master Hồ, is Chinese Zen Master Zihulizong or 子湖利蹤 (800–880), a student of Master Nanquan Puyan. He put a sign in front of his hut saying “be aware of mad dog!” To those who come to inquire about Dharma, he replied “woof! Woof!” Thus, it became a famous koan for the Zen practitioners.

¹⁴³ 幣廬陵昧末過於, chợ Lư Lăng gạo mắc quá ư, or the rice price of the Lư Lăng market” is a koan of Chan Master Qingyuan Xingsi, 青原行思 (660-740), a student of the sixth patriarch of China Chan Buddhism. The origins of this koan come from the story of “青原米價 or rice price of Qingyuan.” A monk asked him “what is the essence of

The rocky trails to Mount Thạch Đầu are very slippery¹⁴⁴,
And it is hard to come and to inquire about practicing Dharma.

Phá -Táo threw away the scared flag, and destroyed the Joss House where he worships the spirits.¹⁴⁵

Câu-Chi raised a finger and continues using the Patriarch's teachings.¹⁴⁶

With the sword of Lâm-Tê,¹⁴⁷ the crutch of Bí-Ma,¹⁴⁸

Back to these old days, monks were trained well, they had lot of freedom.

Dharma of the Buddha?" He replied, "what is the price of rice in the Luling market?" See Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage*, 48-49.

¹⁴⁴ 所石頭礮瀾歇則"Thừa Thạch Đầu đá trơn hết tấc, or The rocky trails to Mount Thạch Đầu are very slippery" is a koan of the master Tri Thiên (he live on the Thạch Đầu Mountain, thus he had the nickname of Monk Thạch Đầu or Shitou). Mater Shitou XiQian (700-790), a student of Master Qingyuan Xingsi. See Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage*, 71-75.

¹⁴⁵ Master Trung Sơn: Phá Táo Đạo, people in the village worship in the Joss House, he destroyed it. Thus people named him as "Phá Táo" (means Joss House destroyer). "Joss house is a Chinese temple, where people worship natural gods (or national heroes); it is a common way of worshiping in animism. In Vietnam, it is called "miếu."

¹⁴⁶ The koan of Master Juzhi, "Câu Chi giơ ngón or raising the finger!" See note 46.

¹⁴⁷ Master Linji Yixuan (787- 886) the founder of Linji Zen School (*Rinzai* in Japanese). This school continues to serve the Zen community today including Japan and Vietnam. See Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage* 155 -161.

¹⁴⁸ 秘魔, or Bí Ma, is a Chinese Zen Master who lived in Mt. Wudai, in China. He used to carry a crutch, and if anyone asked him about Dharma; he raised the crutch and shouted!

The lion of Ông Đoan,¹⁴⁹ the ox of Master Hựu,¹⁵⁰
 Taught the laity who should not be sarcastic and arrogant to their faces.

Raise the fan,¹⁵¹ raise the bamboo stick,¹⁵²
 To help practitioners of Zen to achieve enlightenment easily.
 Throw a wooden ball,¹⁵³ holding the wooden ladle,
 That reminds one that the monks should not show off.

Thuyền Tử paddled along the river; but the river had not yet helped him to purify himself.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ 西余端禪師 or Chinese Chan Master Xi Yu (Tây Dư Đoan Thiền Sư); he has a hat with decorations in many different colors. It looks like the head of a lion. Sometimes, he wears it while he is preaching.

¹⁵⁰ “柴佑, *trâu Thầy Hựu*, or the ox of Master Hựu”, is a koan of Master Quy Sơn Linh Hựu or *Guīshān língyòu* (濤山靈祐) the first patriarch of Guishan Chan School. Master Guishan (771-853) was a student of Baizhang Huahai. One day, he declared “one hundred years later, I will be born as an ox.” This became a koan for many generations in Chan tradition and his school.

¹⁵¹ 扇子 or *Phiến tử* is a bamboo fan of Master Văn Uyển [Wényǎn, 文偃 (864-949)]. He raised his bamboo fan and asked, “do you understand this koan?” See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage* 259-263.

¹⁵² 竹篔 or *Trúc bệ* is a bamboo stick, it is used for hitting sleeping monks during seated meditation.

¹⁵³ 丸毬 or “hòn cầu” is a wooden ball of Master Tuyết Phong Nghĩa Tồn [雪峰義存, *Xuéfēng Yícún* (822-908)]. While giving a talk on Dharma, he used to throw a wooden ball into the crowd to wake them up. See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 237-241.

¹⁵⁴ 船子 or *thuyền Tử* is Chinese Chan Master Thuyền Tử Đức Thành [船子德誠, *Chuanzi Decheng* (805-881) who did want to establish the monastery for teaching monks but he lived on a small boat and it floated around on river. See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 145-148.

Đạo Ngô¹⁵⁵ danced with his wooden sword, but it looked ghostly and mystically horrific.

The dragon of Yên Lão swallowed earth and sky; the watchers were scared of it¹⁵⁶.

The snake of Ông Tồn lay across the world; people saw it, then they must run away¹⁵⁷.

The pine is the mind¹⁵⁸, wanting to see it and then look at the direction of Morning Star.

Bính Đinh¹⁵⁹ belonged to the fire, looking at the direction of North Star, not to get lost the way.

¹⁵⁵ 道吾 Đạo Ngô (769-835) had a wooden sword. Whenever he gave talks on Dharma, he danced to call the spirits. From this activity, this had become a koan: Đạo Ngô trang quỷ (道吾裝鬼 in Chinese) or “Đạo Ngô decorated like the spirits. See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage* 149-151.

¹⁵⁶ 蠃偃老 or *Ròng Yển Lão* is Master Văn Yển’s koan of “The staff of Yunmen manifests into a dragon that can swallow the earth and the sky, or 雲門拄杖化龍). Master Wenyan (864-949) is a Chinese Chan Master of Yunmen Chan School. One day, he raised his staff and he said this koan aloud for his disciples. Se. Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 259-263.

¹⁵⁷ 蝮翁存 or *Rắn Ông Tồn* is a koan of Zen Master Nghĩa Tồn from the phrase of “雪峰繫鼻蛇, or Xuefeng’s snake with the turtle’s noses.” One day, the master Xuefeng (822-908) said, “South of the monastery, there is a snake with a turtle’s noses.” See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 237-241.

¹⁵⁸ 檇柏 or *Cây bách*, a pine tree” is a koan of Chinese Chan Master Zhaozhou or 趙州. Master Zhaozhou (778-897) was a student of Master Nanquan. He attended the enlightenment very young at age eighteen. He ash a famous koan of “the pine in front yard or 趙州柏樹子.” See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage* 136-142.

¹⁵⁹ 丙,丁 or Bính Đinh or two names in ten names of the Celestial in Chinese calendar. They belong to the fire element in The Five Elements or The Wu Xing, 五行 (in Chinese): Metal, Water, Wood, Fire, and Earth.

Despite the tea of Triệu Lão¹⁶⁰, the cake of Thiền Dương¹⁶¹, the students were still thirsty and hungry.

The paddy field of Tào Khê¹⁶², garden of Thiệu Thất¹⁶³, there is plenty of land but the monks leave them deserted.

Throw down a bundle of firewood,¹⁶⁴ blow out the lantern,¹⁶⁵ and this leads to *enlightenment*.

¹⁶⁰ “茶趙老 or Trà Triệu Lão, tea of Master Zhao” is another koan of Chinese Chan Master Zhaozhou. See note 94. People came to him and inquired about the teachings. He said, “Drink your tea!”

¹⁶¹ “餅韶陽 or Bánh Thiền Dương, cake of Thiền Dương” is a koan of the Chinese Chan master Wenyan, see note 92. People come to him and inquire about the Dharma. He replied, “Cake! Cake! Cake!” It became a famous koan of Yunmen Chan School called “Vân Môn Hồ Bính, 雲門胡餅.”

¹⁶² “曹溪 Tào Khê” is a name of Dharma center where the Sixth Patriarch of Chinese Chan Buddhism, Huineing (638-713) established (Baolin Temple). He is the author of Platform Classic Sutra, a text that emphasizes the concept of “no mind”. See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 37-41.

¹⁶³ “少室 or Thiệu Thất” is the garden where Bodhi Dharma meditated in 9 years of a solo retreat. See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 15-20. The author used this metaphor to locate the source of Chan tradition where it begun.

¹⁶⁴ “招拈檜 or gieo bó củi” is a koan or a classical metaphor of Master Tuyết Phong (Xuefeng, see note 93). One day, Maser Dong Shan asked him, “If you want to come in, please open your mouth!” Master Xuefeng replied, “I do not have a mouth!” Dong Shan shouted, “If you do not have a mouth, then you must return your eyes to me, how come you said you do not have a mouth?” Xuefeng threw down his bundle of firewood in his shoulder. Master Dong Shan asked, “Is it heavy?” Master Xuefeng replied, “It is so heavy the world’s population could not carry it.”

¹⁶⁵ “厠梵炷 or Nảy bông đèn, blowing out the lantern” is a koan or classic metaphor of Master Đúc Sơn Tuyên Giám or Deshan Xuanjian - 德山宣鑿 (819-914). He is famous for his Diamond Sutra interpretation and was given the nickname of “Diamond Zhao!” See Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 196-200. One evening, he visited a monk (Chinese Chan Master Longtan, 龍潭), and Longtan said, “It is late, you should go home.” Deshan walked out, he turned back and said, “It is dark.” Longtan lit a lantern and gave to Deshan. Deshan reached for it; suddenly, Longtan blew it out. At this moment, Deshan attained enlightenment.

Seeing cherry blossom¹⁶⁶, listening to sound of a bamboo¹⁶⁷; thus is achieved the noble aura.

Chapter 10

Noble Sangha, please listen:

¹⁶⁶ “祿桃花, Lộc đào hoa or seeing the cherry blossom” is a classic koan of Master Linh vân Chí Càn (靈雲志勤 or Lingyung Zhiqin). He composed a famous poem as an enlightenment poem after seeing the blossom of this flower:

三十年來尋劍客,
幾回落葉又抽枝;
自從一見桃花後,
直至如今更不疑

*For thirty years I've sought the swordsman,
Many times the leaves have fallen, the branch bare.
After seeing the peach blossoms,
Never doubting again.*

See Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage*, 164- 165.

Experience the *true emptiness*;¹⁶⁸ this does not require much capacity and condition.

Because the mind has the attachments; therefore, it is yet not flowing freely; it is not because of the teachings of Patriarchs are inapplicable.

The Sangha of Hinayana practices the Dharma not deep enough yet,
Thus the Buddha was not afraid of creating metaphors for the House of Treasures and City of Phantom.¹⁶⁹

The realization of reality of the enlightened one does not rely on living conditions either in town or in the mountain.

The quiet mountain where the hermits enjoy their life.

The peaceful temples and calm hermitages that are the true places for Zen practitioners.

With great horses with huge parasols, the King of Hell does not exclude the arrogant ones.

With jade-decorated towers or golden mansions, Hell also does not exclude the noble ones.

In favoring fame, and identifying ourselves with the concept of self and others, those who do these are the really ignorant.

But favoring virtues, and transforming mind and body, definitely turns one into the Holy One.

Horizontal eyebrows and vertical nose make the look different but they are the same.

The face may look Holy but the mind remains ignorant, the true and the fake differ like thousands and thousands of miles.

¹⁶⁷ “聽竹, nghe tiếng trúc or listening to sound of swaying bamboo” is a classic koan of Master Hương Nghiêm Trí Nhàn, (or 香嚴智閑, Xiangyan Zhixian died about 898 CE). While cutting grass, a small piece of tile hit the bamboo stalk; he heard that sound and he experienced enlightenment. The story became a classic metaphor in Chan literature. See Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage*, 172-175.

¹⁶⁸ 真空 or chân không, true emptiness. See chapter 4.

¹⁶⁹ “寶所化城 or bảo sở hóa thành” is metaphor in chapter 7 of *Lotus sutra*. In this chapter, the Buddha uses his magic power to create a house with a lot of treasures in a beautiful town. The metaphor emphasizes that all teachings of Buddha are an effective means of helping people to attain enlightenment. They are not the destination, but they are the direction.

The verse that recites:

*Dwelling in the world with the Joy of Practicing the Dharma,
let it flow with its conditions.*

When hungry then eat! Where tired, so sleep then!

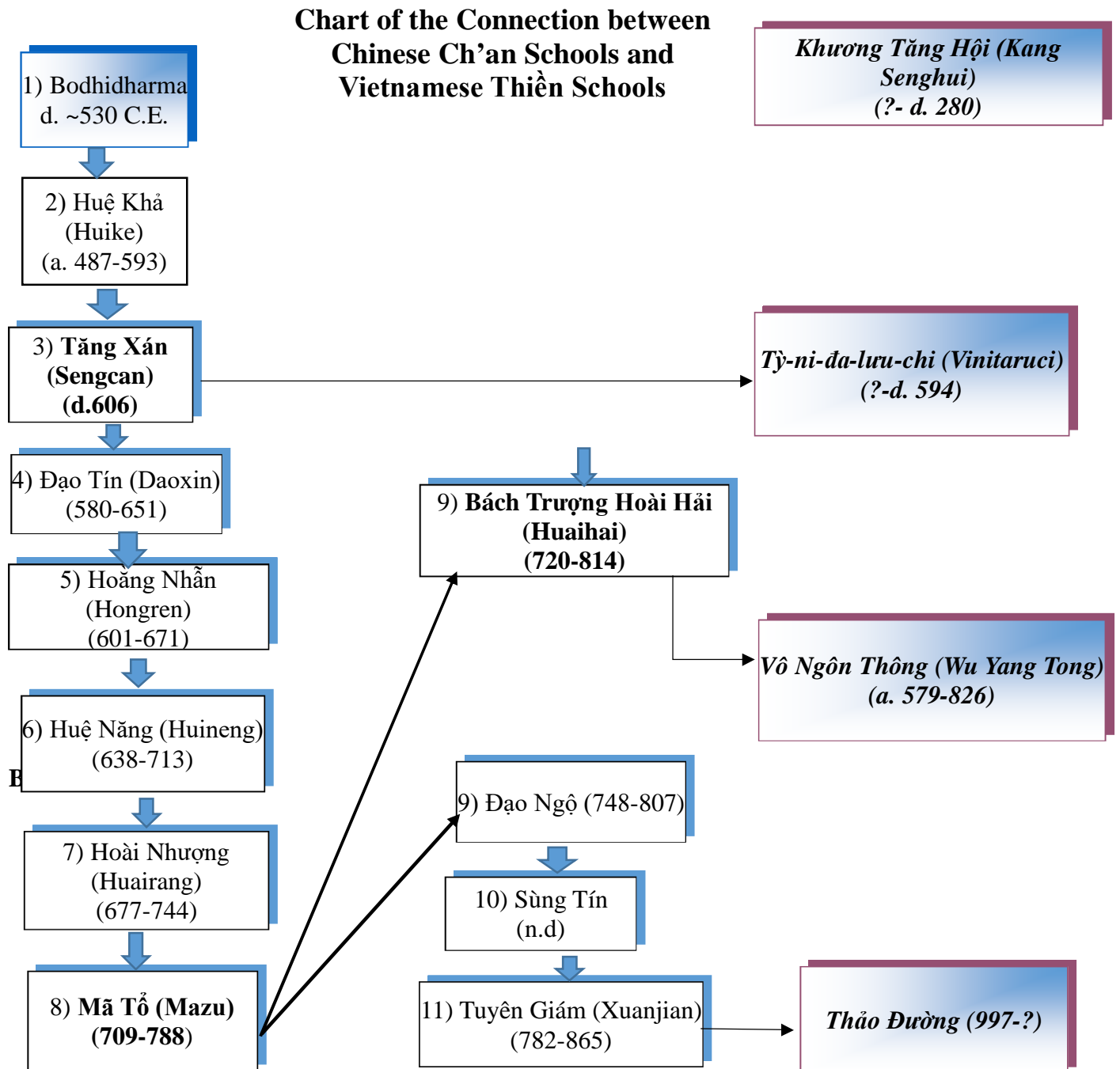
Treasures in the home, suspending the search,

Facing situation with no mind!¹⁷⁰ What inquiring Thiền for

¹⁷⁰ “無心 or vô tâm the doctrine of no mind. See Chapter 3.

Appendix

Chart of the Connection between Chinese Ch’an Schools and Vietnamese Thiền Schools



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