

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THREE PATRIARCHES OF TRÚC LÂM ZEN SECT FOR THE DEVELOPING OF BUDDHISM IN THE TRẦN DYNASTY AND THE HISTORY OF VIETNAMESE IDEOLOGY

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Abstract: *Truc Lam Zen with three patriarchs of Tran Nhan Tong, Phap Loa and Huyen Quang has had many contributions to Dai Viet civilization in the 13rd century as Le Dinh Phung points out in Some Features on Truc Lam Zen - Buddhist Sect in Vietnam printed previous pages. The author of this article confirmed contributions of Truc Lam Zen to Vietnam Buddhism one more again and discuss another contribution of this Zen. That is contribution to the Vietnamese philosophical ideas.*

In recent decades, Vietnamese philosophers are seeking how to write the book on the history of Vietnamese philosophy but are not on the history of Vietnamese ideology as before. In this seeking there are many opposite opinions because philosophers are not unanimous in matter how philosophic ideology is. Some think that philosophy is the system of theory of knowledge on the general rules of nature, economy, society and thinking. Some think that philosophy is knowledge to help Vietnamese people solve many difficulties in order to find outlet or the best behavior.

The question is under discussion that is all philosophic ideology of Vietnamese people was only borrowed and copied mechanically the philosophic ideology of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism without creation. But some Vietnamese philosophers argue that predecessors did not discover the system of abstract philosophy because Vietnamese spent a lot of time and effort, intelligence in the wars of resistance against invaders. Moreover, the philosophic ideas of China and India were introduced into Vietnam so great that predecessors' capacity of mentality on only receiving, studying and applying these ideas in Vietnam context was successful. To understand the philosophic ideas of two civilizations, our fathers' thought reached given standard.

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In this article we discuss the contributions of *three patriarchs of Trúc Lâm Zen sect* for the developing of Buddhism in particular and the development of philosophic thought of Vietnam in general.

From the beginning of the 10th century Vietnam gained her independence after one thousand years of the Northern Kingdom's domination and the history of Vietnamese ideology begun a new chapter. Confucianism and Confucian had no noticeable position in Vietnam society but Buddhism was greatly influential not only in the spiritual but also in political life of the country. Kings of the Lý dynasty venerated Buddhism. They were disciples of Buddhist sects. King Lý Thái Tông (1028-1054) followed Wu Yangtong sect; Lý Thánh Tông (1054-1072) followed Tsao T'ang sect. After abdicating in favour of his daughter Lý Chiêu Hoàng, Lý Huệ Tông (1211-1225) entered religion then Lý Chiêu Hoàng went to pagoda after ceding the throne to her husband Trần Cảnh - king Trần Thái Tông. Many eminent monks held the important posts in the Lý court. Many famous scholars were trained in pagodas. Almost people were Buddhist believers. Prose and verse, art, architecture, thought, custom and style life of peoples were influenced by Buddhism.

In the Trần dynasty Buddhism continued to develop splendidly with the great names as Trần Thái Tông (1225-1258), Trần Nhân Tông (1279-1293). At that moment Vietnamese Buddhism founded Trúc Lâm Zen sect. This sect had "new ideology" different from Chinese Chan sect, Vinitaruci Zen sect of India, Wu Yangtong sect and Tsao T'ang sect of the Lý dynasty. At that moment Buddhism developed widely and deeply in people. When entering religion, king Trần Nhân Tông traveled everywhere to teach ten virtues to people. He built pagodas and became the first patriarch of Trúc Lâm Zen sect. In Pháp Loa period (1284-1330) Buddhism had organization; monks had books to take notes of activities of pagodas. Buddhist sutras were published. At that time we had the book *Tập đại thành*. After reading this book we find that the patriarches of Trúc Lâm Zen sect explained and applied abstract philosophic ideas of Buddhism to contemporary situation, though *Tập đại thành* was continued and inherited by *Khóa Hư lục* written by Trần Thái Tông (1225-1258) and "*Tuệ Trung thượng sĩ ngữ lục*".

Buddhism, himself is a religion but is not theory of philosophy. When discussing the problem of *Moksha* (deliverance from all trammel of life), Buddhism had to answer following questions: What is state of human was delivered from all trammel

of life? What is *Niravna*? What is *Tathata* (the true reality)? How does life do from the cradle to the grave? Does human have soul? Does the real world exist?... These questions not only belong to religion but also to philosophy, metaphysics, it is difficult to distinguish the problems of philosophy and religion in Buddhism.

It is not easy to understand and explain deeply philosophic thoughts of Buddhism. According to Buddhism, words explain people how to understand Buddhist morality; words are only vehicles but not purposes. The final purpose is the mind of Buddha but the mind of Buddha is not described by words because language can be change, born or dead. But the mind of Buddha is unchanged, unborn or unlost. For example, the stories “the forefinger shows the Moon” or “the raft on the river” the final purposes of these stories are seeing the Moon rather than forefinger or when arriving bank one must leave raft. In short, the view of Buddhism on the world and human life is the deep view but it is not clear. The more we study abstract concepts of Buddhism the more we meet difficulties.

The patriarchs of Trúc Lâm Zen sect made the abstract and difficult concepts of Buddhism easily understandable. These concepts are *the mind of Buddha, Buddha nature, Dharma body, the unenlightened mind, transient thoughts, beholding the Buddha nature...*

According to Trần Nhân Tông, “*Tâm*” is just heart, *Tâm* is also human consciousness. It is said deeply *Tâm* is just true mind. Human tries his best to attain true mind. Attaining the true mind is not necessarily to sit in meditation, to eat vegetarian meal and pray to Buddha. Attaining the true mind we must reject greed, anger and ignorance.

The patriarchs of Trúc Lâm Zen sect made the concept of *Dharma body* easily understandable. According to the patriarchs *Dharma body* is different from the ordinary individual. So human tries his best to attain Dharma body. If we would like to attain Dharma body we should hold the Buddha nature and free from Avidya, Vitathavitakka (transient thoughts).

The concepts of *Avidya (delusion), two wrong views* of Buddhism were explained in accordance with Buddhist view by Trần Nhân Tông and Pháp Loa. These concepts were dealt with in the period of Trần Thái Tông and Tuệ Trung thượng sĩ. According to Trần Thái Tông and Tuệ Trung thượng sĩ all things were born by *Vitathavitakka*,

Avidya, and the real world is only fictitious like a dream. In this world human was bound in ignorance so human should free from ignorance.

In general, the patriarchs of Trúc Lâm Zen sect attached important to attain Buddhahood and they did not attach important to sit in mediation, eat vegetarian meal, pray Buddha... According to them, standing, sitting or lying is meditation.

The Zen masters of the Trần dynasty were accredited with having changed Buddhism from *religion of leaving the world into the religion of entering the world*. Although Trần Nhân Tông had a good command of Zen he served his country, he himself led two wars of resistance against the Mongols. Our people memorize his merits forever.

Zen masters of the Trần dynasty considered the life nothingness although they changed Buddhism into the religion of entering the world they sought to leave the secular world and they were not interested in position and fame

This view was manifested in the third patriarch – Huyền Quang. All his poems reflected his secluded life. Huyền Quang replaced Pháp Loa to keep Yên Tử when he was old. Because of ill health he was interested in developing Vietnamese Buddhism little. He did not lay down as a policy the development of Buddhism because this work was completed basically by Trần Nhân Tông and Huyền Quang. Moreover, Huyền Quang and Pháp Loa were not kings so they were not interested the matter that religion enters the world, they thought that monks should leave the secular life.

That is reason why Trúc Lâm Zen sect was declined at the end of Huyền Quang. Both Pháp Loa and Huyền Quang were interested the domain of abstract learning of Zen little, they were only interested in religious practices. The declination of Trúc Lâm Zen sect went together with the declination of the Trần dynasty. After King Trần Nhân Tông, the next Trần kings did not follow Buddhism, they did not favour Buddhism and they had not great contributions to their reigns so the Trần dynasty fell into decay.

Ngô Thì Nhậm presented at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. One of his well-known works was *Trúc Lâm tông chỉ nguyên thanh*. In this work he did not deal with Buddhist conceptions and categories as three patriarchs of Trúc Lâm Zen sect in the Trần dynasty and he did not consider himself believer of Trúc Lâm Zen sect. After reading his works we find vaguely Trần Nhân

Tông ideas that entering into religion without leaving the world. So Ngô Thì Nhậm was considered the fourth patriarch of Trúc Lâm Zen sect. It wrongs for us not to mention Ngô Thì Nhậm when we speak of the contributions of Trúc Lâm Zen sect to the development of Buddhism and philosophic ideology in Vietnam.

Although Trúc Lâm Zen sect of the Trần dynasty was declined, it has been the bright stamp in the developing process of Vietnamese Buddhism because it was a new Zen sect different from Chinese or Indian sect. The patriarchs of this sect created new and independent ideas and they had new explanations on Zen and Buddhism. Their explanations contributed to heighten national thinking. /.