

## Dzau Pagoda - Structure and its Buddhist Altar

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**Abstract:** *Buddhism is considered to enter Vietnam rather early. Material resources show that Buddhism is present in Vietnam around the first centuries of AD and Dzau pagoda is a place-name that often referred to as a first location in which Vietnamese Buddhism originated. However, this paper does not present how Buddhism develops by then, it shows out Buddhism in Dzau pagoda from some its structure aspects.*

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Dzau-Luy Lâu now belongs to Thanh Khương commune, Thuận Thành district, Bắc Ninh province. The visitor can follow National Road #5 on the Hanoi-Haiphong route to Phú Thị crossroads, 14 km from Hanoi. Then turn into provincial route #182 (the way to Bắc Ninh) and continue about 1km into Phú Thị (Gia Lâm district, Hanoi) traveling past Sủi and Keo, to get to Dzau-Luy Lâu. Dzau pagoda's Hòa Phong tower is higher than the bamboo hedge of the village, so it is a landmark for people who return to their ancestral homeland. One wonders for how long the Vietnamese have been told:

*Although you go all over,  
should you see the Dzau Pagoda, come home.  
Whichever trade you follow,  
Remember to come back for the Dzau festival on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April Lunar month.  
(Old folksong)*

That endearing name Dzau, could it be that is the name by which the people's community was first called since the age of the "Dzau" clans (tribes) of the Dong Son period?

In addition, the Mulberry (*dzau* in Vietnamese) is an important brush grown by the ancient Vietnamese. I wonder if mulberry growing, silkworm breeding, and silk weaving appeared at the same time as water rice cultivation, and probably for this reason the name Dzau, not only represents the manufacture of clothing fabric for the

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Vietnamese, but it also presents a symbol of the role of water rice in the surrounding areas of Bac Ninh.

Dzau lies in the center of the lush fertile land of Thuận Thanh district. This area stretches to the south of the Duong River, along the left bank of the Dzau River. The Đuống River (the old name: Thiên Đức) is the main branch of the Red River. The Thiên Đức River links the Red River with the Thái Bình River. This river is 65 km long and runs 39 km through Kinh Bắc from Dzau river mouth (now Xuân Canh commune –Dong Canh). When it reaches Kinh Bắc, this river gives birth to the branch which is the Dzau River embracing the Xứ Bắc (Bắc Ninh area).

The Dzau River has a past as follows:

*“Several adjacent boats floating on the river;  
Some go to Hanoi, others return to Dau River.”*

The Dzau River has stopped flowing a long time ago, leaving here mere traces of the ancient river, ponds and lakes. We, however, can affirm where it formerly flowed. The story of Man Nương tells us that the Dzau River bed was very large, running in front of Dzau Pagoda.

Archeological excavations prove that Dzau pagoda and the Dzau area became a crowded and busy city, the first Buddhist center of our country early in the beginning of the Common Era.

Today Dzau pagoda is also called Cổ Châu, Thiên Dinh Tự, Diên Ứng Tự, or Pháp Vân Tự. It is located in Khuong tu hamlet, Thanh Khuong commune. It stands on a vast flat expanse of land with an area of about 1,730 m<sup>2</sup>, which is divided into smaller sections.

**Area 1.** Three-door temple gate, the path leading to the pagoda, and the pagoda courtyard, the Front Worship Hall or the Secondary Worship Hall, the stupa. The Front Hall, the Incense Burning Hall, the Upper Hall, are surrounded by three walls connecting the two verandahs where arhat statues are installed and where there are conference halls for Buddhists.

**Area 2.** This section is located on the right side of the pagoda [left of the observer facing the pagoda]. It has two separate doors or gates and is surrounded by fences. This section includes Patriarch Worship Hall, rooms for priests, stupas, a well, a fishpond and other facilities

### **I. Architecture of Dzau pagoda**

The general structure of Dzau takes the form of *Nội Công Ngoại Quốc*. That looks like a letter H inside a square. Probably during its development, Dzau was repeatedly rebuilt through different dynasties. That is why the structural study of the pagoda structure is more complicated than that of other pagodas. From outer to inner are located the following:

#### *A. Pagoda courtyard*

The ground outside the pagoda forms a rectangle. The path of 150 meters can be clearly seen. The front or the foot of the courtyard contacts the Dzau River; the back reaches the three-door entrance of the pagoda. The pagoda courtyard now has become the Khuong tu village market.

According to the records, previously this courtyard was a spot for the assembly of cultural activities during festivals. According to the descriptions made by preceding researchers, a roofed bridge spanned the Dzau River enabling visitors to enjoy the watery countryside before they reached the pagoda.

The three door entrance gate (also named Bai Vong Duong or secondary Worship Hall), built in front of the main Worship Hall, forms a structure 28 meters long, 7 meters wide including nine compartments with 10 rows of rafters. Each set of rafters here includes four rows of stand or bases including two principal pillars and two smaller pillars.

Each principal pillar is 3.5 meters high and the smaller one are 2.14 m high. Looking at the structure of the ties supporting the roof, we can see that they are the simple “*keo cau-quà giang*” transversal beams. On both sides of the three-gate entranceway there are long corridors, 48 meters long, 3.8 meters wide divided into 22 equal compartments.

Based on this arrangement, we can assume that Dzau pagoda was enclosed by a closed row of surrounding structures with the Hoa Phong Stupa in the center. Afterwards, its reconstruction required that the buildings behind became the Trinity (*Tam Bao*) Hall of the Pagoda that we see today.

#### *B. Hoa Phong Tower*

The Hoa Phong tower was built on the center of the courtyard. The stupa is a Buddhist structure used to deposit Buddhist relics. Thus, the stupa is considered to be the very presence of Buddha himself. So at the beginning, the relics were adored by walking around the stupa in a counter-clockwise manner while chanting Buddhist

sutras. At present this ceremony is performed during the funeral of a deceased monk or nun. After the cremation, the ashes are placed in the stupa and the Buddhist mourners walk counter-clockwise around the stupa or tomb chanting a sutra. However, when the Mahayana Buddhism was developing in our country, Buddha statues became so numerous that the stupas could not adequately contain all representations of the Buddha. At that time, shrine-pagodas appeared and the stupa became the symbol of the Buddha in the form of a structure. In accordance with such general development, Dzau pagoda at first was located at the Mulberry Tree (dzau) Temple the spiritual center of the inhabitants of the Dzau tribes. When Buddhism spread to Luy Lau, the Hoa Phong Tower was built in front of the Lady Mulberry shrine. During the peak of the Luy Lau as a Buddhism center, Dzau pagoda was built according to its new status.

The Hoa Phuong tower now has three stories made of brick. Its base is large; then it becomes gradually smaller towards its peak. Totally it is 50 meters high.

The first story -the lowest- is a square with sides measuring 6.75 meters. It is 4.5 meters high, 1.60 meters thick.

All four sides have arched doorways. The east and west arches are 2.69 meters high, 1.84 meters wide with steps leading to the doorways. The other two side arches are 2.15 meters high, 1.3 meters wide. There are steps up. The second story is 4 meters high and each side is 6.15 meters long. It also has four arched doorways. On the highest level is a domed roof made of curved bricks. (It looks like the Buddhist sedan chair used to carry the deceased person's photo in the funeral procession). Its summit takes the form of an open lotus flower. The stupa dome is 3.5 meters high.

Inside the stupa, four brick shelves are built into the four sides. Each is 0.86 m x 0.75 m x 0.37 m. On each of these shelves is the wooden statue of a 1.6 m high Dharma guardian. Above these are a gong and a bell both of bronze. The gong was cast in 1837, the 18<sup>th</sup> Minh Mang reign year. The bronze bell is inscribed with the saying, "Cast on the first day of the 12th lunar month of Quy Suu year in the first royal year of Canh Thinh (known as King Nguyen Quang Toan) (1793)."

In front of the perron, the *tam cap*, before the western staircase, there are two squirrels climbing downward. On the left there is a stone ram, 1.33 meters long, 0.8 meter high. At Si Nhiep's tomb in Tam A hamlet, Gia Dong commune, there is a similar stone creature. Probably in the past they were in the same place, one on each side. This reclining ram has curved horns, long ears, a wispy beard, semi-closed eyes

with his knees engraved with Buddhist flowers and Buddhist swastikas. The carving is quite realistic. This type of masterpiece is very rare in Vietnam.

Did it appear at Dzau Pagoda from its beginning days? Was it an embodiment of Central Asian art forms?

Opposite the ram is a four-sided stele.

Face one: The epitaph of the Hoa Phuong Tower, Dien Ung Co Chau pagoda

Face two: List of financial contributions for reconstruction of the stupa

Face three: Foundation laid for future ten thousand generations

Face four: Mid-autumn, 8<sup>th</sup> lunar month of Dinh Ty year (1738)

Following is the content of epitaph on Face one:

“In the past, Chinese Sui King Cao Di [Wen Di] ordered Prefect Liu to bring the relics to Giao Chau. In Giao Chau the great Buddhist Master Phap Hien showed Liu the plot of land in the front of the famous Dzau Lady Shrine and told him to build the stupa there. It would be adored forever. Time slid away, the stupa deteriorated. Born in Cao Cat village, Duong Anh district, Thuong Hong prefecture, Hai Duong province, Mr. Vu Ha Thuy (in other records Vu Ha Trang) alias Hue Tien, titled Marquis Kien Tho, royal Palace Guardian a servant and his wife, named Nguyen Thi Huu (Buddhist name Dieu Chinh) called upon the people to share their contributions to rebuild that stupa. The reconstruction started in mid-autumn of the 8<sup>th</sup> lunar month in Dinh Ty year [or August 1737] and was completed in the 4<sup>th</sup> lunar month in Mau Ngo year (April 1738).” Additionally, a stone sign is on the west side of the stupa’s 2<sup>nd</sup> story with three Chinese characters saying: Hoa Phong Tower. Next to these three engraved characters are smaller ones meaning “Made on the auspicious day of the summer 4th lunar month of Mau Ngo year (4<sup>th</sup> Vinh Hue royal year (1738) (in the reign of King Le Y Tong). Thus, the year of the stupa’s reconstruction is engraved on the four-sided stele and that engraved on the plate are the same.

Judging from the writing of the characters of other deceased priests’ stupas built behind the pagoda and those engraved on the stelae there, they coincide with Hoa Phong stupa. The name Hoa Phong thap (stupa) was given by Mr. Vu Ha Thuy (or Vu Ha Trang) on the occasion of his rebuilding of that stupa. Luu Phong (Chinese Liu Feng) brought five boxes of *xa li* (Buddha relics) to Giao Chi to install in the new stupas. One box was installed in Dzau pagoda (602-605 CE), one of them

at Tuong Khanh pagoda (in Nam Dinh), one in the Chau Hoan (in Thanh Hoa), one in Chau Ai (in Nghe An) and the last in Chau Phong (in Vinh Yen, Phu Tho). <sup>1</sup> It is regretted that books during the years of the Chinese Sui Dynasty (589-618 CE) did not record this historical fact. During his talk with Empress Dowager Linh Nhan (Y Lan) of the Ly dynasty, the monk Tri Khong (royal preceptor Thong Bien) quoted Buddhist priest Dam Tien's (Tan Xian) answer to Chinese King Sui Wen Di that "Buddhism entering China had not yet spread to Giang Dong (the eastern provinces), meanwhile in that country (the Great Viet) over 20 stupas had been built in Lien Lau area."

So could it be that Hoa Phong stupa is amongst the 20 important ones in the answer to the King Sui Wen Di? According to *Geography of China and its Southern Neighboring States (Thuy Kinh Chu)*, King Asoka, a zealous Buddhist Indian King in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, sent Buddhist emissaries to our country to propagate and insure Buddhism here.

Concerning its architectural form, Nguyen Ba Long mentioned that a primitive form of the Hoa Phuong stupa looked like a Chinese Sui dynasty stupa engraved in Van Cuong and Long Mon in North China, (Yun yang and Long Men) dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

According to the above-cited records, we can see that in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, a stupa symbolizing the Buddha existed in the Dzau pagoda courtyard. If, on Ashoka orders, any stupa was built in Vietnam, the earliest one might have been there in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. Since the 6th century until now, the Dzau pagoda stupa underwent many restorations. Hence, it is difficult to say that the stupa there is a vestige of the one that Prefect Luu Phong built at Dzau Pagoda (when King Sui Wen Di ordered the propagation of Buddhism in Vietnam).

(*Viet Su Luoc*) noted that, "In the reign of the first Thong Thuy reign year, Ly Thai Tong or Phat Ma (1034), the Van Phap pagoda priests saw light rays being emitted from the stupa. Following these light rays, they discovered a stone box; In that box was a box made of silver; In that silver box was a gold one; Inside the gold box was a crystal box; In that one there were relics of Buddha's bones.

This information was learned upon the collapse of the stupa, when the Buddhist did not dare expose the relics to the weather, so they installed them inside

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<sup>1</sup> Chau Hoan in Vietnamese = Hoan Chau in Sino-vietnamese. Chau Ai =Ai Chau etc

the pagoda. During the years of King Tran Nhan Tong (1293-1314), Mac Dinh Chi, First-rank scholar, supervised a great reconstruction. Since then, the hundred compartment pagoda, nine-story stupa, a nine-span bridge and then the stupa gradually fell into ruins. In the 4<sup>th</sup> Vinh Huu reign year of Le Y Tong (1738), Mr. Vu Ha Thuy (or Vu Ha Trang) and monk Tich Mo of the pagoda, called for contributions to the reconstruction and called it Hoa Phong stupa.

In 1969, when Dzau pagoda belonged to the Hanh Phuc commune, the stupa was in a terrible statement of collapse. The Cultural Office of Hà Bắc province had it solidly rebuilt as we see at the present time.

### *C. Front (Main) Hall*

The Front Hall stands on a plot of ground 9.5 m wide, 21m long. That ground is 0.3 meter lower than the Incense Burning Hall. It is 0.6 meter lower than that of the Upper Hall.

This Front Hall has seven compartments with 8 sets of ties and 32 pillars; each set of ties governs 4 pillars with the following structure:

Two principal pillars, 4.65 meters high.

The tie makes a bridge on the summit of the two columns. Two *Xa nach* (linking beams) and a *buc con* (a bas-relief plank) link the Incense Burning Hall. The *buc con* is engraved with animals. Under the front roof the principal pillar is linked to the smaller one by a linking beam and a rectangular “con” engraved with clouds. From the smaller pillar to the veranda is the *ke*, a short cross-beam, which is the horizontal connector of secondary and veranda pillars. The height from the roof short cross-beam (*ke*) to the ground is 2.65 meters.

In front of the Front Hall are the *tam cap* (or perron) steps, flowing along central five compartments. In front of the central compartment, there are two stone staircases carved with dragons, 2.15 meters long and 0.65 meters high. Stepping down from the staircase, we are on the stupa courtyard, 1.25 meters lowers than the ground of the Upper Hall. The courtyard is covered with bricks 50 meters long, 20.5 meters wide. In its center is the Hoa Phong stupa ground.

On the ridgepole of the Front Hall, the following Chinese characters are engraved, “The most auspicious 15<sup>th</sup> day of 11<sup>th</sup> lunar month in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Khai Dinh royal year, [1921] while the Front Hall was rebuilt, this ridge pole was installed.” On the right *Dau Cau* or pillar head bridge joint, the following Chinese characters are

engraved as follows, “On the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> lunar month in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Khai Dinh Royal year, this Front Hall began to be rebuilt.” In such manner, the Front Hall was rebuilt exactly between the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> lunar month and the 15<sup>th</sup> of the 11<sup>th</sup> lunar month in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Khai Dinh reign year, i.e., the 13<sup>th</sup> October to the December 17, 1921.

#### *D. Incense Burning Hall*

The Incense Burning Hall links the Upper Hall and the Front Hall. This house is 9 meters long and 7 meters wide. Its level is 30 cm lower than that of the Upper Hall. As a result, the Incense Burning Hall has an average height of 4.15 meters, and 12 pillars, each 4.45 meters high. The two middle pillars supporting each set of ties holds up eight roofing poles and the ridgepole. On the cau dau, or the bridge head tie beam of the principal pillars or the bridge joint to create a cornice or edge with regular resistance to install the roof pole. On both sides from the principal pillar head to the smaller pillar head, there are xa nach or linking beams. On the part adjacent to the Upper Hall between the two linking beams, there is a short pillar, called “hidden” or “avoiding” dividing the space into two equivalent intervals. Between those two distances there is a plank of two right triangles used as both a decorative element and as a supporter of linking beams. It also holds the pressure and fills out the empty space. From the principal pillar head to the outer smaller pillar head there were two linking beams. Between these two beams, is a “con,” in fact, a right triangle wood plank which separates the Front Hall and the Incense Burning Hall. Between the two vertical beams there is a thin plank.

Structurally, this is the vertical view of the Chinese character cong (I). Some people call it an “ong muong,” that is, a linking aisle.

In the Incense Burning Hall there is a stele, 1.37 meters high, 0.91 meter wide installed on the back of a tortoise, 0.37 meter high. The stele says, “The royal ordinance dictated that Co Chau’s Dien Ung pagoda was rebuilt on the 20<sup>th</sup> day, the 12<sup>th</sup> lunar month in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tu Duc royal year (1850).” Its principal content is “In (1802) Gia Long assigned 15 guardian coolies and 3 villagers to be in charge of worshipping in the Phap Van Pagoda. In 1840, King Minh Mang granted an honorary title to Phap Van Lady Buddha...”

#### *E. Upper Sacrificial Hall*

The Upper Hall is built 1.27 meters higher than ground level. It has a rectangular shape 14.1 meters long by 10.4 meters wide. The floor area is 11.5 X 8.0



meters. The Upper Hall is a structure of 4 sets of ties, with one compartment and 2 lean-tos. Each set of ties governs 4 pillars that are, two principal pillars and two secondary smaller ones. The principal pillars and the smaller ones have the same diameter: 0.5 meter. The distance between the two principal pillars is four meters. The principal pillar is 4.1 meters high. The height of the two smaller ones is not the same. The front one is 2.85 meters while the rear one is 2.6 meters high. As a result, the higher pillar makes the front roof 0.56 meter shorter than the rear one. Thus, the front roof tends to appear more “flying” than the rear. The height from the ridgepole to the floor is 6.6 meters. The structural components of the set of ties on the Upper Hall is the two principal pillars linked together by a big bridge joint the beam traversing over the pillar summit. The smaller pillar is attached to the principal pillars by means of linking beams. Between linking beams are dragons engraved with stylized clouds. Especially on the tie beam, there is another bridgehead called “*gia chieng*,” in “gong-rack” style. The two sets of ties on the central compartments of the Upper Hall have the same bas-relief decorations on both sides.

Architecturally, the system of linking beams and ties beams, bridge heads and system of short pillars as with supporter to the closing plank, stacked planks were installed in regular intervals in order to create the corner edge or cornice.

Eight roofing poles link the roof and the ridge beam in the center. The system of principal pillars and smaller pillars, like *cau dau* (bridge heads) and *xa nach* (tie beams) and *xa doc* (horizontal beams connecting the *vi*) create a very strong column skeletal framework to hold up the entire weight of the roof.

Structurally, the rafters in Dzau pagoda range along three following types.

The triangular rafters, without pillars, in the Front Hall and the Worship Hall.

The rafters in stacked ties–transversal beams in the Incense Burning Hall.

The Rafters in stacked tie–gong rack style in the Upper Hall.

## **II. Architectural development**

In the process of architectural development, triangular rafters are the most primitive type. At first they were supported by three rows of pillars and one transversal beam. They linked with each other by means of the mortise or by means of bamboo, wooden or bamboo ties or ropes buried into the ground.

This type of rafter is still preferred and used in many areas for auxiliary structures or temporary houses. As the standard of living became higher, housing construction required improved techniques. These triangular rafters without pillars

between the smaller pillars buried in the ground gradually came to be replaced with wooden pillars installed on pedestals. They went from having no pillars to the “stacked ties-gong rack” style. This style secures a beautiful fine art appearance and also retains the solid technical specifications, with great weight-bearing capacity, when the house floor is broadened. Under those conditions, the stacked ties-gong rack style and bridge heads and linking beam assure even weight distribution, causing the dispersal of roof pressure over supporting pillars. Rafters in Dzau pagoda reflect the Vietnamese architectural characteristic both in tradition and in folklore aspects.

Rafters in Dzau pagoda are handled in the following steps:

1. The rafters are tied with rope, and then tenons are chiseled out.
2. And then tied again by means of fasteners in combination with ropes. As wooden architecture developed, a great leap forward in structure is the concept of tenon chiseling in the usual formula: *Thuong thu ha thach*, which is, tapering towards the ceiling.

M. Maus, a researcher on technology, has said: “In our research on the mortise, we can identify the cultures of different people. Black Africans, the Australian aborigines mainly use rafters and ties of bamboo.” The tenon jointing makes the rafters secure and immobile. Under such conditions, it is very easy to assemble and disassemble them. This structure makes the whole set of *keo* become a uniform structure. According to Nguyen Khac Tung, “stacked ties-gong rack” is of Han influence. In fact, that style evolved from the rectangular rafters, three rows of pillars, then withholding pillar, to staked ties and gong racks. We must say that the carpenters are among the most talented skilled men of the handicraft industry and that craft developed early. Archeologists have discovered numerous vestiges, such as different kinds of flat tiles, hooking tiles and tube tile heads for sewers dating from the beginning years of the Common Era.

In the Luy Lau area, archeological excavations and studies discovered a large collection of bricks and tiles used in buildings. (Sketches)

Buddhism entered Vietnam rather early accompanied by quite a development of building techniques for the construction of pagodas and stupas. In studying Dzau pagoda we can understand that developmental process, as it proceeded in stages through the ages. /.