

THE BUDDHA’S TEACHING AS APPLIED BY TUE TRUNG THUONG SI AND HIS INFLUENCE ON VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM



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ABSTRACT

Buddhism in Vietnam was directly brought from India by a monk named Su Phat Quang in 257 BCE.¹ Later Vietnamese Buddhism has developed into different sects, but Zen schools have been the most predominant. Especially prominent was a well-known Buddhist named Tue Trung Thuong Si whose lifestyle was seemingly similar to that of a Bodhisattva; he applied the Buddha’s teaching to the cultivation of morality, concentration, and wisdom. Also, he helped learners to comprehend the Buddha’s teachings. His point of view about the teaching “entered the world” is imbued with the personality of a Bodhisattva who embarks in a life to save all beings. Therefore, this paper attempts to discuss how he applied the Buddha’s Teaching with this method of Zen and his influence on Vietnamese Buddhism. The great contribution of him was that people practiced his teachings and achieved final enlightenment and liberation.

Keywords: The Buddha, Tue Trung Thuong Si, Vietnamese Buddhism, Entered the World

¹Le Manh That, **History of Buddhism in Vietnam**, vol I, (HoChiMinh City: Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House, 2006), p. 24.

INTRODUCTION

Buddhism was established in Vietnam in the middle of the 3rd century BCE.² Since Buddhism was established and developed in Vietnam, there have been three Zen schools introduced from abroad, namely: the Ty Ni Da Luu Chi Zen Sect, the Vo Ngon Thong Zen Sect, and the Thao Duong Zen Sect. However, those three schools were not suitable for Vietnamese spiritual development at that time. Therefore, it was necessary for Buddhism to develop applicably to Vietnamese culture, tradition, and social life. Tue Trung Thuong Si adapted Buddhism towards these circumstances.

Tue Trung Thuong Si (1230-1291) was an influential lay Buddhist in the Tran dynasty in Vietnam. He played an important role in protecting the nation, shaping the social lifestyle and encouraging people to live ethically. He was a governor and a famous military general who led a resistance against three Mongolian invasions. His wisdom is profound like the ocean as is his capability of teaching the Dharma to the learners of three levels³. In other words, he was talented in teaching meditation through the three Vehicles⁴ and the three kinds of enlightenments.⁵

His most outstanding trait is the teaching of the Spirit of “Entered the world”, non-attachment, reaching the truth of emptiness and the way to reach enlightenment. This is the most striking aspect of his thoughts and his meditation technique.

In addition, Tue Trung Thuong Si made substantial contributions to the peace of the country and to Buddhism. Particularly, his meditation techniques have been the foundation of the advent of the Truc Lam Zen sect. He had worthy, profound influence on Vietnamese Buddhism, and on the building of the Vietnamese Buddhist literature to create a perennial power in the Nation’s history.

² *ibid.*, pp.19-26.

³ Three levels means: the upper, middle and lower is widely accepted.

⁴ Three Vehicles means: Śrāvakayāna, Pratyekabuddhayāna, and Bodhisattvayāna.

⁵ Three kinds of enlightenments means: self-enlightenment, enlightening of others, and perfect enlightenment and achievement.

THE LIFE OF TUE TRUNG THUONG SI

Tue Trung Thuong Si was called “Tran Tung”. He was the eldest son of Kham Minh Tu Thien Dai Vuong (Tran Lieu), and the eldest brother of the Queen Nguyen Thanh Thien Cam (the wife of King Tran Thanh Tong).⁶ In addition, as a good dharma lay-devotee, he received a Dharma name known as “Tue Trung”, meaning The Wisdom Within. His title, given by King Tran Thanh Tong⁷, was Thuong Si, meaning The Superior Person.⁸ This name also means the Bodhisatta.⁹

Furthermore, he was a disciple of Zen Master Tieu Dao at the Phuoc Duong monastery where he learned the Dharma and comprehended the essential tenet. Everyday he took pleasure in Zen studies without carrying positions of fame. He returned to Tinh Bang Hamlet, the village where he lived his last life and was finally renamed ‘Van Nien’, Meditation for fun, where he dedicated his time to study the Dharma and cultivation of his mind.

To our contemporary society, he is widely respected as he was accepted by king Tran Thanh Tong. The king also sent his young prince, Tran Kham (later became King Tran Nhan Tong), to learn Dharma with him. Tue Trung Thuong Si was upheld in high reverence and considered a ‘master’ by the king Tran Nhan Tong. In 1291 he passed away at the age of 61.¹⁰

HIS APPLICATION OF THE BUDDHA’S TEACHING

There are several viewpoints of Tue Trung Thuong Si application of the Buddha’s Teachings such as that of the ‘Entered the World’, the ‘Freedom of Thinking and Non-attachment,’ and the ‘Turning the Spotlight to Ourselves’. However, his applications discussed here will be the most well-known ones.

⁶Ly Viet Dung (tr.), **Collection of Famous Saying by the Great Tue Trung**, (Ca Mau: Ca Mau Publishing House, 2008), p.506.

⁷King Tran Thanh Tong (1240-1290) was the second emperor of the Tran dynasty.

⁸Nguyen Giac (tr.) and commented, **The Wisdom Within: Teachings and Poetry of the Vietnamese Zen Master Tue Trung Thuong Si**, (California: Thien Tri Thuc Publications, 2010), p. 7

⁹Ly Viet Dung (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁰Nguyen Lang, **Essays on the History of Vietnamese Buddhism**, (Ha Noi: Literature Publishing House, 2000), p. 258.

A Viewpoint on “Entered the World”

This teaching is given in two aspects: teaching of ‘Hoa Quang Dong Tran’ and teaching of ‘Let all things take their Course.’

1) The Hoa Quang Dong Tran¹¹

The ‘Hoa Quang Dong Tran’ is a term derived from Mahāyāna Buddhism used to describe the attitude and commitment of the Bodhisattva in life¹² who continues to work for the salvation of all beings. The King Tran Nhan Tong himself had summarized the teaching of the ‘Hoa Quang Dong Tran’ of the Zen master Tue Trung Thuong Si recorded in ‘The Superior Person’ with the following remarks:

The Zen master Tue Trung Thuong Si who lived among of the secular life, mixed his truth life with the world. In every communication he never met in trouble cases because of his peaceful attitude. So he could succeed to the seeds of dharma, and helped the learners. Those who came to ask for his dharma advices were all shown the profound meanings, and given some useful ways to calm their mind. He was not bound by the form, when he disappeared or appeared, and he did not hold name and reality.¹³

The ‘Hoa Quang Dong Tran’ is the core teaching of Tue Trung Thuong Si’s meditation, particularly the Vietnamese Zen in Ly–Tran dynasties. Contrary to the common people of the time, Tue Trung Thuong Si’s life, poetry, and collection of aphorisms are a clearly evident lifestyle of the ‘Hoa Quang Dong Tran’ that brought the light of wisdom to the world. In other words, he brought the light of truth in order to protect and rescue human life. However, the light of his wisdom couldn’t be contaminated by the secular world. A lay life is pollution and disturbance, but a Bodhisattva has transcendental wisdom and universal love. This is also a way of life, or the “in accordance with the situation” behavior that agrees with the concept of moral standards of the majority men. Nevertheless, to act in

¹¹ “Hoa Quang Dong Tran” is a Vietnamese Buddhist phrase, including two meanings: 1) Mingling with the world by hiding the light of his wisdom and virtue, and 2) The state of Buddhas and bodhisattvas concealing their glory and mingling among the living beings on earth for the purpose of saving the souls of the latter.

¹² ‘Mix Bodhisattva in life’ was the title coined by King Tran Thanh Tong to Tue Trung Thuong Si. This title means Bodhisattva who entered the world to teach and convert or transform men.

¹³ Nguyen Lang, *op.cit.*, p. 258.

accordance with the situation is not synonymous with a passive attitude that is swept along by the flowing secular life. The 'Hoa Quang Dong Tran' is full of proactive posture of the one who embodies the truth when entering the world.

Tue Thuong Si applied the 'Hoa Quang Dong Tran' in his own life as a 'Dharma action', a way of life where the correct principle doctrine penetrated into his own life in great detail.

The unique features of the lifestyle of the 'Hoa Quang Dong Tran' in the Thuong Si's Zen poems is the posture known as 'venerably imposing'. This is a posture of an easy-going person who is imbued with the spirit of ego, and impermanence. One who enters the world very gently but confidently, "With the golden light shimmering on eyelashes, I stride into the dust realm".¹⁴

It is not necessary to mention the philosophy or doctrine Thuong Si¹⁵ took himself to 'set an example'. His actions themselves were a testimony to the lifestyle of one that enters the world for the sake of others. He showed us the real value of the Truth that is not separated from life, the Truth that created the spirits, the personalities, and the human lifestyle. Before becoming a man of the Truth, we must be human beings who have enough strength, courage, and intelligence to realize the truth of life and live rightly with 'worldly wisdom'. This is the 'Hoa Quang Dong Tran' teaching by which a Bodhisattva enters the world with altruism to teach and convert and transform men.

2) 'Let All Things Take Their Course'

The teaching of 'Let all things take their Course' highlights the importance of converting and transforming people according to their conditions and circumstances in general. Depending on the opportunity and the particular area, one should have a method which is suitable to different sentient beings, but one must always keep the True Dhamma goal, and never mislead. According to Thuong Si's Zen poems, 'Let all things take their course' brought extremely positive and vivid value. 'Let all things take their Course' is a way of the meditative life of an enlightened being. Living through 'Let all things take their Course' brings a free style of liberal and impartial behavior.

¹⁴ Nguyen Giac (tr.), and commented, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁵ Thuong Si is another name of Tue Trung Thuong Si. There are some other names of him such as Tue Trung, or Tue Trung Thuong Si.

‘Let all things take their Course’ of Thuong Si is divided into two ways: \ ‘Let all things take their Course’ to ‘help life’ and ‘Let all things take their Course’ to ‘receive the Truth’.

The former means the lifestyle and behavior of Thuong Si towards the objective factors happening to him. According to Thuong Si, all things on earth have their own of function. Once there is ‘sufficient condition,’ they will be formed.

‘Let all things take their Course’ of the Zen master Tue Trung Thuong Si was not synonymous to a yielding and uninteresting attitude, or a person who was unable to change reality. Such a way is the lifestyle and behavior of an Enlightenment who has realized ‘the face of mother’ of all things.

‘The face of mother’ is referred to the Buddha nature that remains in all human beings. Anyone who becomes enlightened, the Buddha nature will be revealed, and he will see that the names of the heavens and beings are all false names.

If a Dharma practitioner wants to give his life for the people’s benefits, he must adapt himself to the opportunity and be consistent with the True Principle.

So the teaching of ‘Let all things take their Course’ to ‘help life’ is a way of life that is flexible and open-minded without expecting satisfying or perfect conditions. The standard is to recognize, assess, and put everything in its right places do to its inherent nature.

‘Let all things take their Course’ to ‘Receive Truth’ is a kind of poetry that contains the ideas which rise above the habitual view of the spiritual Enlightenment in the Zen tradition. His poetry also shows the readers the necessary rule of Truth.

Zen sects have their own view on preaching the Dharma and ‘Receiving the Truth’. However, his later concept gives optimism to the learners who believe in the ultimate destination that Zen sects aim towards, for example, the Zen emphasis on the ‘sudden Enlightened Zen’ rather than the ‘Gradual awakening Zen.

To prevent the Dharma learners from feeling inferior or discouraged, Thuong Si opened another broad-minded door for the Acarin, those that follow the religious life,: when the primary cause meets the environmental cause, one will achieve what one wants. Therefore, ‘Let all things take their Course’ to ‘Receive Truth’ is a point of view that imbues the spirit of Thuong Si’s Meditation.

In addition, ‘Let all things take their Course’ to ‘Receive Truth’ is the behavior to penetrate human feelings. With a great superior character, the teaching is as a reminder of the nature of enlightenment. With someone who does not belief in the Triple Gem, it becomes a ‘pep talk,’ encouraging heartiness.

A View of ‘Freedom of Thinking and Non-attachment’

‘Non-attachment’ is one of the highlights of Tue Trung Thuong Si’s meditation thought. When beings understand ‘non-attachment’ thoroughly, they will achieve the state of ‘no-self’ in Buddhism.

A View of ‘Freedom of thinking and non-attachment’ appeared very early in the history of Buddhism including Vietnamese Buddhism. In the Diamond Sūtra says: “The Buddha spoke Dharma for forty-nine years and when the time of his Nirvāṇa arrived, he said that he had not spoken one word.”¹⁶ The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra teaches: “from the night of the Tathāgata’s Enlightenment till the night of his entrance into Nirvāṇa, he has not in the meantime uttered, nor ever will utter, one word”,¹⁷ and “for 49 years I have not added one to the Dharma which all the Buddhas of the past, present and future preach.”¹⁸

Thuong Si meant for his followers to recognize the essence of his teachings. They must practice the Dharma and not rely on the language he used.

A View of ‘Freedom of thinking and non-attachment’ had been taught not only by the Buddha Sakyamuni, but also by previous Buddhas. When Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam, free thinking and non-attachment had already been received by the Vietnamese Zen masters. Inheriting it from his Zen predecessors, Thuong Si was especially interested in the thinking beyond doctrines which are considered as a mainstream technique to attain enlightenment. According to Thuong Si, when a practitioner has gained enlightenment, he needs to ‘break’ not only the chain of dualistic thinking, but all concepts. Hence, his methods help followers to liberate from attachment. These non-attachment methods have been applied thoroughly and comprehensively in all aspects of Zen practice for the attainment of Buddhahood.

Thuong Si’s freedom of thinking and non-attachment:

One day the Monk asked Thuong Si: The sūtra says: Emptiness is form; form is emptiness:

¹⁶ Dhyana Master Hsuan Hua (tr.), **The Diamond Sutra**, (San Francisco: The Sino-American Buddhist Association, 1974), p. 149.

¹⁷ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (tr.), **Lankavatara Sutra**, (London: London published, 1932), p. 125.

¹⁸ Steven Heine (ed.), **Dōgen Textual and Historical Studies**, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 178.

Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.

All Buddhas of the three times say that for convenience.

Originally, emptiness is not form; originally, form is not emptiness.

Shining bright, the nature neither gains nor loses.¹⁹

Thuong Si applied the emptiness idea to break wrong view of the Buddhist practitioners. He explained that form is emptiness, and *vice versa*. They are one, and both of them are empty by nature. Because sentient beings are ignorant, they still distinguish between form and emptiness, once enlightened, they will see everything is empty. Buddhas of the past, the present, and the future have and will consider the Dharma as the means in which to preach the Dharma. By nature, emptiness does not contain any form, and form does not contain any emptiness either. The True Nature is always shining bright, neither gained nor lost. Because Thuong Si was enlightened by the Truth, he knew all things do not begin nor end, his behavior was free and liberal.

He fought for the abolition of relying on the outside. Enlightenment must be attained by oneself: The hearers meditate; I don't. The bodhisattvas give dharma talks; I tell the truth.²⁰

Thuong Si's ideas are neither conceited nor immodest. To him, the Hearers (Śrāvaka)²¹ were Buddhist practitioners who were not enlightened; they needed to cultivate the mind by chanting, practicing meditation, and so on. Furthermore, the Hearers need to practice Buddhism further in order to attain Bodhisattvahood. Thuong Si thought that the Buddha is in our mind, inside of us, not outside. Both the unwise and the wise have the same Buddha Nature. Because of the distinction of mind, there are some differences between the ignorant and the enlightened, the unwise and the wise people. Thuong Si is different from a hearer. He became a wise man who had attained enlightenment. That is why he said he no longer needed sitting meditation, while the Hearers still needed that practice. As he wrote: "The Hearers meditate; I do not." He was enlightened, he is different from Bodhisattvas. He tells the truth while Bodhisattvas preach the Dharma for sentient beings. To him, "the truth" is the true nature of all phenomena, and the contemporary society of his time.

¹⁹ Nguyen Giac (tr.) and commented, *op.cit.*, pp. 171-173.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 37.

²¹ The Hearers (Śrāvaka) means one of the Three Vehicles Śrāvakayāna, Pratyekabuddhayāna, and Bodhisattvayāna. The Hearers being set on their own liberation, and cultivating detachment in order to attain liberation.

One day, the Queen Mother Thien Cam held a royal banquet, and showed a surprise when she saw Thuong Si eating meat:

“You practice meditation, and now you eat meat. How can you become Buddha?” asked the king’s mother.

“Buddha is Buddha,” replied Tue Trung. “And I am what I am. I don’t need to be Buddha. And Buddha doesn’t need to be me. You probably heard the words from old sages, “Manjusri is Manjusri; enlightenment is enlightenment.”²²

Here, Thuong Si taught the Queen Mother Thien Cam as well as future generations, a valuable lesson about ‘indiscriminate thoughts’. Buddhahood is the essential enlightenment nature of each sentient being. If one’s self-substance is covered by affliction, then the Buddhahood is covered. When the affliction is calmed down, the inherent knowledge can be revealing like a lighthouse to guide and illuminate mankind. Then, sentient beings will become Buddhas. As Thuong Si said, “I don’t need to be Buddha and Buddha doesn’t need to be me.”

According to Thuong Si’s idea, people are ignorant because they cling to the above concepts due to their ‘dualistic views’, and their dichotomous awareness of the real world. When attaining liberation, people often erect boundaries between ‘delusion’ and ‘bodhi,’ the holy and unholy, the enlightened and the stupid, the nirvāṇa and the saṃsāra, and so forth. So, they should tend to abandon their positions and move to the position of liberation, enlightenment, and nirvāṇa. Thuong Si criticized ‘dualistic views’, and broke the wall of *ignoramus* surroundings. Then he gave the ‘superior character or capacity’ (transcendental knowledge) giving opportunity to attain enlightenment quickly.

Being the Zen Master who is free, courageous, and free from self, Thuong Si wanted to make the practitioners feel the same spirit of ‘non-attachment’. However, Thuong Si’s ‘non-attachment’ attitude in this case is reserved only for those who study Buddhism and belong to the ‘superior character or capacity’ (transcendental knowledge) in the Zen world. Moreover, Thuong Si did not deny the role of doctrines, or the process of time for meditation, or the valuable realms of attainment. He just wanted everyone to not be attached to them; they are only a boat to cross the river, once ones pass the river, one should leave it.

²²Ly Viet Dung (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. 507.

A view of ‘freedom of thinking and non-attachment’ in Thuong Si’s meditation helped people to understand the value of meditation and right-livelihood. He delineated the Way to Buddhahood. Thus, people do not need to look beyond themselves but inside themselves. All living beings have the Buddha Nature, one must extinguish delusion, this is the purpose of his view of ‘freedom of thinking and non-attachment’.

‘Turning the Spotlight to Ourselves’

To ‘Turn the Spotlight to Ourselves’ is the essential thought of the Zen master Thuong Si. He applies this idea to meditation every day, and teaches it to the potential learners.

‘To Turn the Spotlight to Ourselves’ means that the person has to consider and reflect the body and mind from all gestures and actions and bring them back to the breath.

One day, being asked by King Tran Nhan Tong about the essence of Zen, Tue Trung replied, “Reflect inwardly to see the essence of you. Do not follow other ways.”²³

‘Reflect inwardly to see the essence of yourself’ means one should turn into oneself to revive the mind and to liberate the wisdom that is always available in your natural mind. His thought was similar to the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, when the Buddha was going to enter *Nirvāṇa*, he taught and summarized methods of practice to his disciples. Those were the messages and the great encouragement for his disciples who needed to cultivate themselves after the Buddha had passed away.

The Buddha to Ānanda:

Ānanda, dwell with yourselves as your own island, with yourselves as your own refuge, with no other refuge; dwell with the Dhamma as your island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge.²⁴

Those viewpoints can be considered his principal teachings. Thus, the essence of the Zen sect originated by Thuong Si that the King Tran Nhan Tong had transmitted is very similar to the core of the Teaching of Buddha in the *Nikāya Sūtra* collections.

Based on those ideas, Thuong Si’s new idea thoroughly emphasized that one should not look beyond oneself, one should listen to the miracles of the Buddha Nature within oneself. Thuong Si said: “Eyebrows are horizontal, nose is vertical—no difference.

²³ Ly Viet Dung (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. 505.

²⁴ S V 154.

Buddha and sentient beings have one same face.²⁵ There was no mind anciently; there is no Buddha now.”²⁶ Our mind is concealed by false thoughts and ignorance. Many people often go seeking an unreal silhouette, and forget themselves. Thuong Si emphasized that they need to turn to themselves. If they want to receive the Dharma Wisdom, they must use their vitality and cannot rely on others.

Thus, ‘To Turn the Spotlight to Ourselves’ is the core of cultivation and also the most original characteristic of Thuong S’s teaching. He emphasizes that all the disciples have to make their own effort to attain the pure mind, and then they could attain the perfect enlightenment. This thought is not for someone, but for everyone who wants to be on the path of enlightenment., ‘To Turn the Spotlight to Ourselves’ is a basic thought and a useful guideline for Buddhist practitioners.

THE INFLUENCE ON VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM

Since its establishment in Vietnam, Buddhism has gone through periods of prosperity and recession, however, it has survived. Although there the many changes in the country, the Teachings of the Buddha has never changed, but has been passed from generation to generation. Thuong Si, who brought the Buddha’s Teaching to the Vietnamese has a profound influence on the people wiyhin many fields of study.

King Tran Nhan Tong²⁷ was the founder the Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect. It is the Zen school that has been developed from the first Patriarch of Zen.²⁸ He imbued Zen as a philosophy of identity for Vietnamese Buddhism. This Zen sect has continued to grow radiantly and illuminate the spiritual paths for many generations in Vietnam. Its influence ws handed-down to two Patriarchs: Phap Loa (1284-1330)²⁹ and Huyen Quang (1254-1334).³⁰

²⁵ Nguyen Giac (tr.) and commented, *op.cit.*, p. 39.

²⁶ Institute of Literature, **Ly Tran Poetry and Literature**, Vol II, (Ha Noi: Society and Science Publishing House, 1988), p. 273.

²⁷ King Tran Nhan Tong (1258- 1308) was the eldest son of King Tran Thanh Tong (1240 – 1290) and the Queen Nguyen Thanh Thien Cam. Afterwards, he left his homelife to Hoa Yen temple on the Yen Tu mountain and later on, he founded the Zen school, namely, Truc Lam Đâu Đa, which is presently known as Truc Lam School, as well as the Zen sect the Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect.

²⁸ Nguyen Lang, *op.cit.*, pp. 279-280.

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 287-288.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 331.

King Tran Nhan Tong learned the Dharma with Thuong Si when he was a child and was deeply impressed by his master's meditation. One day, the King asked his master about the essence of Zen, he really wanted to learn about the secret method of enlightenment that his master had attained by the guide of the Zen Master Tieu Dao so that he could gain some experience on the path of enlightenment. Thuong Si's reply made the King understand the essence of Zen, "Reflect inwardly to see the essence of yourself. Don't follow other ways."³¹

That view of Zen profoundly influenced the Truc Lam Zen sect. According to the Zen Master Thich Thanh Tu, "Thuong Si has attained enlightenment" of Phat Hoang (the Zen master Tran Nhan Tong), "Mind-To-Mind Transmission."³²

This influence can be seen in the poem 'Cu Tran Lac Dao' of the Zen Master Tran Nhan Tong:

Living amid dust and enjoying the way, you should let all things take their course.

When hungry, just eat; when tired, just sleep.

The treasure is in your house; do not search any more.

Face the scenes, and have no thoughts; then you do not need to ask for Zen.³³

The spirit of the above verses is the principle of the first patriarch and the consistent thought of the Meditation School that has manifested through these four aspects:

- i) Harmonize the life without attachment.
- ii) Act according to conditions. It means to do what is needed, in the right time, and not against the natural law.
- iii) Be confident in oneself, returns to stimulate one's own potential and do not rely on others.

³¹ Nguyen Giac (tr.) and commented, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

³² Thich Thanh Tu, **Record of the Words of Tue Trung Thuong Si**, (HoChiMinh City: HoChiMinh Publishing House, 1997), p. 263.

³³ Nguyen Giac (ed.), **Tran Nhan Tong: The King Who Founded a Zen School**, (California: Thien Tri Thuc Publications, 2010), p. 55.

- iv) Do not be slaved to anything, neither to meditation nor the Buddha.³⁴

Master Tran Nhan Tong taught people how to practice the Dharma to create blessings, virtues, and wisdom for their own benefit as well as others. This teaching is greatly respected. However, those who lived their lives as a recluse in the forest without enlightenment do not save others, this is blameworthy behavior. Master Tran Nhan Tong was influenced by Thuong Si's behaviors: "I mix with the secular, harmonize with light, and never hurt or go against anything or anyone."³⁵ Thuong Si's opinion formed an idea in Master Tran Nhan Tong who 'entered the world' actively. This opinion is the fundamental guideline and activity of the Truc Lam Zen sect. The opinion touches people's hearts, and gives the 'belief shelter' to most Vietnamese people.

Those views are the decisive factors to the 'handed-down tradition' of the Truc Lam Zen School to advocate, engage actively, bring blessing and joy to people, and to achieve liberation (or to attain Buddhahood).

Vietnamese Buddhist Literature

Thuong Si is not only an enlightened Zen master but also a poet of genius. The majority of Thuong Si's Zen poems are concentrated in the 'Thuong Si Ngu Luc' book. This book mainly presents his meditation experience and his enlightenment. This is the way he wants his learners to understand. Thuong Si's original Zen poems discuss meditation, but he rarely uses the terminology of meditation rather lyrical and poetic prose. Thuong Si's Zen poems concern both beauty and the stages of attainment of Buddha-truth. This style brings freedom, and spontaneity to his poetry. However, his poetry is still solemn and deep as was his character in daily life. These are important factors that created the originality of his Zen poems.

Thuong Si creates a large volume of literature that contains Zen philosophy and poetry of nature. According to the Authors of Van Tho Ly Tran, the compositions and the translation work of the Thuong Si, which are collected in Thuong Si Ngu Luc book, are divided into three parts. Part one is the Collection of Aphorisms which consists of Zen Conversations and Koan Study. This part was recorded by the Zen Master Phap Loa and

³⁴ Academy of Social Sciences, **Tue Trung Thuong Si with Vietnamese Zen Buddhism**, (Da Nang: Da Nang Publishing House, 2011), p. 12.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 13.

revised by Tran Nhan Tong.³⁶ Part two consists of forty nine poems under a variety of topics and genres. Part three comprises one lesson, The Superior Person, written by the Zen Master Tran Nhan Tong, including eight lessons from eight Zen masters of the Truc Lam Zen school. The epilogue was composed by Do Khac Chung. The whole book was printed in 1863 by the Zen Master Tue Nguyen at the Long Dong temple on Yen Tu mountain, and reprinted in 1903 (by Master Thanh Cu of the Phap Vu temple) as well as in 1943 by the Tong Hoi Phat Giao Bac Ky.³⁷ At present, this publication is circulating around the country.

The Fatherland

When talking about the Vietnamese history three unforgettable wars against the Mongol (1257-58, 1285, 1287-88) must be mentioned. At that time, the Dai Viet or Vietnamese was one of the great powers in South East Asia. Thuong Si was an important part of the Mongol resistance. He was the most trustworthy aristocrat of the Tran dynasty during the three wars against the Mongol. He directly commanded the troops to attack the enemy. As a talented commander, he was devoted wholeheartedly to his homeland. These are some of the most glorious historical victories that have been handed down from generation to generation. According to the historian researcher Nguyen Khac Thuan, “A monumental success of all three wars for defending our country that affected profoundly powerful the thoughts and feelings of staff of writers, and the whole development of national literature in this period.”³⁸

CONCLUSION

Tue Trung Thuong Si was an outstanding Zen master in applying the Buddha’s teaching to the cultivation of morality, concentration, and wisdom. His lifestyle as a Bodhisattva who devoted his life to save all beings and his point of view of “entered the world” made substantial contributions to Buddhism and to Vietnamese Buddhist literature. He is known not only because of the advent of the Truc Lam Zen sect, a famous Zen school today but also because he helped create a perennial power in the history of the region.

³⁶ Institute of Literature, Vol II, *op.cit.*, p. 224.

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 224-225.

³⁸ Nguyen Khac Thuan, **The Dai Viet in the Tran Dynasty**, (Ha Noi: Thanh Nien Publishing House, 2002), p. 235.

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