

**An Analytical Study of the *Procedure and Protocol of Performing Repentance*  
*Throughout the Six Divisions of the Day* Compiled by Trần Thái Tông (r. 1225-1258)**

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Hanh Thi Minh Nguyen

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Hanh Thi Minh Nguyen  
Candidate

04/19/2022

An Analytical Study of the *Procedure and Protocol of Performing Repentance*  
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APPROVED:

William Chu  
Chair

04/11/2022

Lewis Lancaster  
Committee Member

04/05/2022

Trian Nguyen  
Committee Member

03/28/2022

**I hereby declare that this dissertation has not been submitted  
as an exercise for a degree at any other institution,  
and that it is entirely my own work.**

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gift that I can give them as a small token of appreciation for their financial, constructive, and emotional support.



## Abstract

An Analytical Study of the *Procedure and Protocol of Performing Repentance Throughout the Six Divisions of the Day* Compiled by Trần Thái Tông (r. 1225-1258)

By

Hanh Thi Minh Nguyen

This dissertation provides an analysis and annotated translation of the *Procedure and Protocol of Performing Repentance Throughout the Six Divisions of the Day* 六時懺悔科儀 (*Lục Thời Sám Hối Khoa Nghi*, hereafter the *Procedure*), one of the most important manuscripts on repentance within the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, written by King Trần Thái Tông (r. 1225-1258). Trần Thái Tông argues that by single-mindedly and devotedly performing the ritual purification, a religious practitioner is able to achieve a high meditative state, which eventually leads to enlightenment. The dissertation provides an analysis of this influential ritual text, while also highlighting the syncretic character of Vietnamese Buddhism with respect to the incorporation of different types of Buddhist practices and spiritual traditions that comprise Vietnam's cultural history.

The study is based on a close reading of the ritual text within the framework of the King's *Essays on Emptiness* 課虛錄 (*Khóa Hư Lục*) along with two other Chinese repentance texts, namely, the *Jeweled Repentance of Emperor Liang* 梁皇寶懺 and the *Compassionate Samādhi Water Repentance* 慈悲三昧水懺. In addition, the analysis also presents a structural comparison between the ritual text and Chinese repentance texts of

the same genre. This comparison leads to the conclusion that the *Procedure* is the only extant text within the genre in which the six senses are treated as separate objects of repentance activities. Due to its historical and religious significance, the *Essays on Emptiness* becomes a “sutra” for Vietnamese Buddhists.

This dissertation addresses a significant gap in Western language scholarship on Vietnamese Buddhism. The study provides the first known English translation of the *Procedure*, as well as an analysis and comparison of the repentance practice within social, historical, and religious contexts of the syncretic Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. The analytic study of this ancient text helps us understand how this famous Buddhist king’s religious practice and written works have actively transformed and continue to influence present-day Vietnamese Buddhism.

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## List of Abbreviations

<i>Cổ Châu</i>	<i>Recorded Sayings of the Pháp Vân Buddha at Cổ Châu</i> (古珠法雲 佛本行語錄 <i>Cổ Châu Pháp Vân Phật Bản Hạnh Ngữ Lục</i> )
<i>Essays</i>	<i>Essays on Emptiness</i> (課虛錄 <i>Khóa Hư Lục</i> )
<i>Edition 1</i>	AB. 268
<i>Edition 2</i>	R. 1200
<i>Edition 3</i>	R. 37
J	Jiaxing da zang jing (嘉興大藏經)
LHBS	<i>Jeweled Repentance of Emperor Liang</i> (梁皇寶懺 <i>Lương Hoàng Bảo Sám</i> )
NLV	National Library of Vietnam (Thư Viện Quốc Gia Việt Nam)
<i>Procedure</i>	<i>Procedure and Protocol of Performing Repentance Throughout the Six Divisions of the Day</i> (六時懺悔科儀 <i>Lục Thời Sám Hối Khoa Nghi</i> )
<i>Removing Doubts</i>	<i>Mouzi's Treatise on the Removal of Doubts</i> (牟子理惑論 <i>Mâu Tử Lý Hoặc Luận</i> )
SNI	Sino-Nôm Institute (Viện Nghiên Cứu Hán Nôm)
T	Taisho (大正新脩大藏經)
TBTS	<i>Compassionate Water Repentance</i> (慈悲水懺 <i>Từ Bi Thủy Sám</i> )

TĐL	<i>Biographies of the Awakened Ones</i> (聖登錄 <i>Thánh Đăng Lục</i> )
<i>Thiền Uyển</i>	<i>Biographies of Eminent Monks in the Thiền Garden</i> (禪苑集英 <i>Thiền Uyển Tập Anh</i> )
<i>Toàn Thư</i>	<i>Complete Book of Historical Records of Great Việt</i> (大越史記全 書 <i>Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư</i> )
TVLT	<i>Poetry and Literature of the Lý-Trần Dynasties</i> (Thơ Văn Lý Trần)
X	Wan xin zuan xu zang jing (卍新纂續藏經)



## Chapter One:

### Introduction

*Transgressions arise from the mind, [then] use the mind to repent.  
When the mind is purified, transgressions are also wiped away.  
Mind purified and transgressions eradicated, both are entirely empty [in nature],  
This is called the true repentance.*<sup>1</sup>

These four verses are often found repeated in various Vietnamese repentance ritual, manuals, and are often cited in the Dharma lectures given by the monastics for the laity on the Uposatha days.<sup>2</sup> Originally, they are from the *Vajracchedikā Samādhi Repentance Ritual* (*Jingang sanmei xingfa* 金剛三昧行法) as recorded by Jizhen 寂震 (Chinese Qing dynasty) in the *Jingang sanmeijing tongzongji* 金剛三昧經通宗記.<sup>3</sup> Because of the connection between the texts, it is possible to assume that Jizhen's narrative of the *Diamond Sūtra* was in circulation in pre-modern Vietnam. The procedure

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<sup>1</sup> Translations are mine, unless otherwise noted. The literary verses are as follows.

罪從心起將心懺。 *Tội từ tâm khởi tương tâm sám.*

心若滅時罪亦亡。 *Tâm nhưc diệt thời tội diệt vong.*

心亡罪滅兩俱空。 *Tâm vong tội diệt lưỡng câu không.*

是則名為真懺悔。 *Thì tắc danh vi chân sám hối.*

Due to its popularity, there are several available translations of these four verses into English. Thích Nhất Hạnh's translation is slightly different from all others' because the last two verses contain his own interpretation. His translation is chanted by monastics and practitioners of Plum Village tradition. See Thich, *Chanting from the Heart*, 2007.

The translations of the *Sagely City of 10,000 Buddhas* and by Trian Nguyen are most close to the original text. Nguyen's translation is read as follows:

Offences arise from the mind; use the mind to repent.

When the mind forgotten, offences are no more.

Mind forgotten and offences eradicated, both are empty.

This is called true repentance and reform.

For more on this, see Buddhist Text Translation Society, *Daily Recitation Handbook*, 197 and Nguyen, "At the Deathbed," 14.

<sup>2</sup> Uposatha or Posaḍha ceremony is held twice a month on the new- and full-moon days when monastics gather together and recite the Prātimokṣa/Pāṭimokkha regulations in order to declare the purity of the Saṅgha. This tradition began as early as the reign of King Aśoka and quite likely prior to that time, when the Buddhist Saṅgha was growing and its corruptions-likely due to the superfluous patronage of the laity and the royal class-began to appear.

<sup>3</sup> X. no. 652, vol. 35.

of the Vietnamese repentance rituals is similar to that of the *Vajracchedikā Samādhi Repentance Ritual*. Aside from this discovery, I still have not found any concrete evidence for how the four verses became relevant in different repentance manuals that were circulated among Vietnamese Buddhist communities. More importantly, I found a great void of the study of repentance scriptures and practices in Vietnamese Buddhism. There has been little to no available scholarly research regarding these matters, and that impelled me to take on this project.

I began to read repentance scriptures in Vietnamese language and observed the occasions that Vietnamese Buddhists had recited those texts. Most of them are translated from Chinese Mahāyāna sūtras and note the Chinese influences on Vietnamese Buddhism. While going through some old repentance rituals that were composed by Vietnamese Buddhists, I came across the *Procedure and Protocol of Performing Repentance Throughout the Six Divisions of the Day* 六時懺悔科儀 (*Lục Thời Sám Hối Khoa Nghi*, hereafter referred to as the *Procedure*), written by King Trần Thái Tông (r. 1225-1258).<sup>4</sup>

The text caught my attention because of its historical impact on Vietnamese Thiền Buddhism.<sup>5</sup> Trần Thái Tông was the first king of the Trần dynasty (1225-1400) and a devout Buddhist. The King had close interactions with eminent Buddhist figures from

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<sup>4</sup> All dates are CE unless otherwise specified.

<sup>5</sup> Thiền 禪 is the equivalent of Chan in Chinese and Zen in Japanese. This term is derived from the word dhyāna in Sanskrit. Due to the influence of Suzuki's works in the West by the second half of the twentieth century, the term Zen became more prominent among the Mahāyāna Buddhists. For more on Zen, see Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 32-37.

However, I have retained the usage of the Vietnamese term “Thiền” throughout this dissertation because Thiền Buddhism in Vietnam, to some extent, identifies with the Vietnamese Buddhism at large which is syncretic and composite in nature. Chapter Two of this dissertation deals with the interpretation of Thiền Buddhism in Vietnam.

Yên Tử tradition who directly influenced and inspired his grandson, Trần Nhân Tông, to establish the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect in the thirteenth century. In the words of Cuong Tu Nguyen, the Trúc Lâm was the “first serious effort to establish a Zen school in medieval Vietnam.”<sup>6</sup> It is possible that the *Procedure* was being circulated among monastics and the laity when this Thiền sect was flourishing during the Trần dynasty. The *Procedure* was the earliest repentance ritual that has been in existence. It introduced the daily-based repentance practice, which has since declined in many Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions. In its place, the focus been more so on bi-monthly repentance performance. Therefore, studying the *Procedure* serves two purposes. First, it provides an understanding of the continuity of daily repentance rituals in Vietnamese Buddhism. Second, the study sheds some light on how the practice of repentance functioned in Vietnamese Thiền Buddhism.

During the early twentieth century, the Buddhist Reform Movements took place in different parts of the country. Vietnamese Buddhists undertook the reconstruction and revision of the history of Vietnamese Buddhism in several modalities: through textual translations and studies, renovation of Buddhist temples and monasteries, and reforms in Buddhist education. These events led to the calling for the revival of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect of Thích Thanh Từ towards the end of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> The *Procedure* was then transformed and implemented in the system of Thích Thanh Từ’s Trúc Lâm monasteries in Vietnam and abroad. This study is being carried out in order to come to a better understanding of the relevance of the text and its indigenous origin.

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<sup>6</sup> Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 20.

<sup>7</sup> To differentiate between the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect of the Trần dynasty and Thích Thanh Từ’s Trúc Lâm Thiền sect in the twentieth century, I call the latter the Neo-Trúc Lâm Thiền sect.

## I. Scope and Purpose

The dissertation presents a historical and textual analysis of the *Procedure* within the context of Thiền Buddhism in medieval Vietnam, which is syncretic in nature. In other words, the *Procedure* will be treated as a hermeneutical lens through which to explain the syncretic and innovative feature of Vietnamese Thiền Buddhism. This syncretic characteristic locates the Thiền tradition at a crossroads of religious sectarianism and pluralism. If Cuong Tu Nguyen considered Thiền an “imagined community” of medieval Vietnamese Buddhism, I would argue that this is the result of a long journey the Vietnamese have taken in defining their cultural and religious identity.<sup>8</sup>

The *Procedure* itself is unique among Mahāyāna repentance scriptures in its structure and practice. Additionally, it is also an uplifting admonition, and a literary work. The text has historical significance due to its association with a well-known ruler who is regarded as a patron of Vietnamese Buddhism. Furthermore, this is the only extant repentance ritual of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect of the Trần dynasty and the only complete work among the extant writings of Trần Thái Tông. The King’s literary works were later compiled and renamed as the *Essays on Emptiness* 課虛錄 (*Khóa Hư Lục*, henceforth referred to as the *Essays*). His *Essays* laid an important foundation for the teachings and practices of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect of the Trần dynasty.

In this study, I question how Thiền came to be regarded as a high form of Vietnamese Buddhism with its dual aspects of religious sectarianism and syncretism and

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<sup>8</sup> In this study, cultural and religious identity is simply understood as the self-understanding of a person or a community in the process of constructing their cultural and religious ground. This is the conception or expression of “Who I am” or “Where I belong to.” In the case of Vietnam, the determination of religious identity or identities is not defined by means of a bond with one religious affiliation but rather with the blending of different religious traditions. In other words, traditional religious syncretism is the key element in the way Vietnamese people understand their cultural and religious identity.

what are the reasons the *Procedure* was made to fit such a context. In addition, the study is also an attempt to retrace a history of repentance practice in Vietnam, which has been overlooked among Vietnamese scholars. The textual analysis will be done by means of an interdisciplinary method, via both synchronic and diachronic approaches. This is because there is no obvious distinction between literature, history, and philosophy in most medieval Vietnamese Buddhist texts, and that is also the case for the *Procedure*.

In conducting the research, I pose a hypothesis: Despite challenging the idea of religious orthodoxy, Thiền Buddhism is a representation the syncretic character of Vietnamese religions. The character of religious syncretism is dominant in the process of defining a Vietnamese cultural and religious identity. Historically, understanding and defining Vietnamese religious and cultural identity was an essential goal of Vietnamese Buddhists over centuries, at least from the second century onwards, from the introduction of Buddhism to Jiaozhou 交州/Giao Châu (one of the ancient names of Vietnam) to the establishment of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect of the Trần dynasty during the thirteenth century. The process of defining Vietnamese religious identity was, on the one hand, a cultural reaction against the long-term Chinese domination. On the other hand, this need to define Vietnamese religious identity also presumed the parallel and equivalent position of Vietnamese and Chinese culture. Vietnamese people continued to work on this process

for the sake of cultural and political independence until the pre-modern times,<sup>9</sup> when the idea of nationalism was introduced in the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Nationalism has influenced the scholarly research on intellectual, cultural, and religious process in Vietnam, including the Lê Mạnh Thát's widely read study about the history of Vietnamese Buddhism. With the exceptions of Cuong Tu Nguyen's translation and study of the *Biographies of Eminent Monks in the Thiền Garden* 禪苑集英 (*Thiền Uyển Tập Anh*, hereafter referred to as the *Thiền Uyển*), an important text of Thiền Buddhism in medieval Vietnam, and Dung Ngoc Duong's close reading and research of the three Vietnamese traditional sources, there has been minimal scholarly commentary or study about Vietnamese Buddhism in English language that would provide any element of a distinctive Vietnamese Buddhist worldview.

Syncretism is the paradigmatic religious view that has shaped the dominant interpretations of the nature of Vietnamese Buddhism. Considering the history of early and medieval Vietnamese Buddhism, three syncretic tendencies took place, namely (i) the Unity of Three Teachings 三教同源 (*tam giáo đồng nguyên*),<sup>11</sup> (ii) the interactions of

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<sup>9</sup> The term “premodern” in this study refers to the time prior to the twentieth century when the classical Chinese was still the lingua franca of East Asia (i.e., China, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan), when the Confucian teachings were still norms of the area and before the intellectuals started to learn about the Western idea of nation, when the term “nationalism” was spread all over Asia.

<sup>10</sup> Nationalism is a product of French Revolution (1789), and the term was used widely by European scholars by the late nineteenth century. From studies of nationalism, Benedict Anderson came up with a definition of the nation as “an imagined political community” which will be discussed in this study as well. See Benedict, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> On terminology, the Unity of Three Teachings 三教合一 (*Tam giáo hợp nhất*) denotes the mutual influence and combination of Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism. Its variations, such as “the Three Teachings go back to One” 三教歸一 (*Tam giáo quy nhất*), “the Three Teachings are One Teaching” 三教一教 (*Tam giáo nhất giáo*), “the Three Teachings originate from one source” 三教一源 (*Tam giáo nhất nguyên*) and “the Three Teachings have the same origin” 三教同源 (*Tam giáo đồng nguyên*), has circulated among the Sinological literature as a symbol of religious reconciliation. Among these expressions, Vietnamese people are more familiar with the last reference “*Tam giáo đồng nguyên*.”

Buddhism with the indigenous folk religions, and (iii) the mingling of different Buddhist traditions including Esoteric, Pure Land, and various Thiền sects that have existed in Vietnam. In the next section, I will discuss the syncretic blending of Vietnamese Buddhism in the context of the Unity of Three Teachings while the other two tendencies of religious syncretism will be further investigated in Chapter Two of the dissertation.

## **II. Religious Syncretism**

This section is an attempt to analyze the syncretic process among Vietnamese religious traditions. I argue that Vietnamese people tend to combine and harmonize different beliefs and religions, when they have the chance to contact with them, as an act of forming their own cultural and religious identity and strengthening their national unification. This is a continuous process throughout the history of Vietnamese culture and religion. To understand that religious dynamic, it would be appropriate to clarify the theory of syncretism in religious studies and the application of syncretism in Vietnamese religious context.

### **1. Towards a Religious Identity**

Syncretism is an ambiguous term, the definition of which has undergone a long evolution among Western theologians, historians, and sectarians of religion. In general, the concept of syncretism in religious studies relates to the transmission of religions. According to Judith Berling, syncretism is “the borrowing affirmation, or integration of concepts, or practices of one religious tradition into another by a process of selection and

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In this study, the Unity of Three Teachings will be treated as “traditional syncretism,” which is a combination and harmonization of different religions or systems of thought. I borrowed the term “traditional syncretism” from Ch’ien, *Chiao Hung*, 116.

reconciliation.”<sup>12</sup> Timothy Brook offers another definition: “Syncretism is the process by which elements of distinct religions are merged into a unitary worldview.”<sup>13</sup> These definitions are easily applicable to the prophetic religions, which, once revealed, are seen as coherent belief-systems from the outset. Following those definitions, the fundamental values of every religion must be unique and distinctive.

Over time, the discourse around religious syncretism has evolved and the term has been given a negative connotation. Western theologians and sectarians have often associated syncretism with a betrayal or corruption of belief, with randomness and with superficiality. If the assumption is that religion should be exclusive and sacred, then syncretism seems like a perfidious betrayal, because through the syncretism process, some elements or principles of the religion have been changed or adapted, innovated upon, or have mingled into one another. The believers or practitioners—regardless of religion—often perceive those changes as corruptions as they begin to raise questions pertaining to the orthodoxy and integrity of those systems of belief.

The syncretic process leads to adaptation, assimilation, amalgamation, changes, and innovations in each religion. Those changes and innovations often go unnoticed until they are mentioned with respect to some theoretical or empirical conflict between religions, discourses, or religious groups. Scholars of religious syncretism called this unconscious syncretic formation.<sup>14</sup> This mode of syncretic formation can lead one religion to find itself as part of another one. An example of this type of syncretism is the

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<sup>12</sup> Berling, *Syncretic Religion*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Brook, “Rethinking Syncretism,” 13.

<sup>14</sup> Droogers, “Syncretism, Power, Play,” 225.



interaction between Buddhism and Daoism in Chinese religious history, as analyzed by Christine Mollier in *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face*.<sup>15</sup> The Chinese Chan Buddhism was a typical result of this type of syncretic encounter, although Chan masters and practitioners could trace their continuous lineages and transmissions all the way back to the historical Shakyamuni Buddha.

Another mode of syncretic formation is a more conscious one, taking place when a dominant religion or culture interpenetrates or shapes the less dominant religion or culture. This process often takes place when systematic religions encounter popular or folk religions. In such instances, there are examples where images of local gods might come to be shown in the representations of the clothing of the dominant religions' gods. For instance, the deities of Shingon Shintō<sup>16</sup> were identified with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as the result of the interaction of Chinese Esoteric Buddhism and Japanese Shintō. The sun goddess Amaterasu is a manifestation of Mahāvairocana (The Great Sun) Buddha, and the rituals for the goddess were also performed by Buddhist priests in the Shingon Shintō temples.

Syncretism is one of the more recognized aspects of Vietnamese religions. Historically, Vietnamese people seemed to welcome different religious traditions into their spiritual lives both as a way to enrich their culture, and as a method of consolidating their people's strength. This was possibly a consequence of a long-term experience of

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<sup>15</sup> Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism*.

<sup>16</sup> Shingon Shintō, known as Ryōbu Shintō (Dual Aspects of Shintō), is a syncretic combination of Shintō and Shingon Buddhism, the Esoteric Buddhist School in Japan. This school was well-developed during the Heian and Kamakura dynasties and continued to spread and gain influence during the eighteenth century.

continuous conflicts, civil wars, and invasions from other countries.<sup>17</sup> The belief in “unity in diversity” (*thống nhất trong đa dạng*) is not just a common slogan but has been a shared attitude among Vietnamese people throughout history, and it comes up often when discussing national cultural matters, especially regarding religions and ethnic groups. Throughout the history of religion in Vietnam, syncretism is considered as a paradigm that has been central to the construction of a national identity.

During the early and medieval periods, the syncretic process took place through the dynamic interactions between local folk religions and some of the “great traditions,” such as Buddhism and Daoism, and that synthesis actually helped those religions gain acceptance and recognition in Vietnamese society. Confucianism was also introduced to Vietnam by the Chinese ruling class during the earlier part of the Common Era. Following a millennium of Chinese dominance, the three religions co-existed in harmony and were incorporated into the local cultures. From the very outset, in the history of religion in Vietnam, there was no such thing as “pure” Buddhism, “pure” Confucianism, or “pure” Daoism. All forms of religious traditions combined and mingled into one another for the sake of enriching their ideologies.

The theory of Unity of Three Teachings had been a model or paradigm of religious philosophy since the tenth century, when Vietnam gained its independence. The co-existent pluralism of the three religions in medieval Vietnam still allowed for a dominant or most comprehensive religion whether Buddhism, Confucianism, or Daoism-

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<sup>17</sup> Vietnam did not gain its political independence from the Chinese domination until the tenth century. Such a long history of being dominated made Vietnamese people cautious with outsiders. To them, the outsiders were their enemies or invaders. Therefore, in the Vietnamese way of thinking, national unity should be placed above everything else. Any aspect of Vietnamese culture should be compatible with that concept. Religions are not the exception, and that is why syncretism is highly regarded in Vietnamese culture.

and yet the three religions were nonetheless synchronized and compatible. In other words, the co-existence of the three religions was not necessarily an equal balanced ecumenism but a self-conscious harmonization within a hierarchical order. Historically, this hierarchical order of the three religions changed depending on how each religious tradition associated itself with the political powers of the day, and the extent to which each religion maintained a political commitment to the nation as part of its propaganda.

From the tenth to the fourteenth century, Buddhism held the highest position among the three religions. During this time, several Vietnamese kings presented themselves as divine kings and promoted Buddhist teachings, and they employed Buddhist monks as their spiritual and political advisors. Around the fifteenth century, Confucianism arose as the most dominant religious tradition among the three when the Confucian literati had a stronger voice in political affairs of the state. Daoism maintained its humble profile while being assimilated into folk religions or into Buddhism. At present, the discourse of the Unity of Three Teachings has remained prominent in some newer religions in the South Vietnam, namely the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương,<sup>18</sup> Hòa Hảo Buddhism,<sup>19</sup> and Caodaism.<sup>20</sup> Due to the scope of this study, I will only discuss a

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<sup>18</sup> The Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương (Wonderful Perfume of Precious Mountain) was formed by Đoàn Minh Huyền (1807-1856) in South Vietnam who claimed himself the Master Buddha of Western Peace (*Phật Thầy Tây An*). This religious tradition was considered as a reform movement and also used syncretism as religious paradigm to build up their doctrine and applications. The theory of Unity of Three Teachings was the foundation of the sect while its doctrine aimed to achieve a synthesis of “Dual Path of Self-Realization of Thiên and Pure Land” (*Thiên Tịnh Song Tu*). See Ho Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics*, 20-43.

<sup>19</sup> Hòa Hảo Buddhism was established by Huỳnh Phú Sổ in 1939 in South Vietnam. The fundamental teaching of this religious sect was the conflation of the three religions. For the account of Hòa Hảo Buddhism, see Ho Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics*, and Vo, “Hoa Hao Buddhism.”

<sup>20</sup> Caodaism is also a new religion of the South Vietnam since the twentieth century that was based on the idea of religious syncretism. Caodaism includes the dynamic interactions of the Unity of the Three Teachings as well as Christianity, Islam, and political figures. For an overview of Caodaism, Smith wrote two articles covering its historical background, the beliefs and organization. See Smith, “Origins and Early History,” 335-349; and Smith, “Beliefs and Organization,” 573-589. Recently, Janet Hoskin has published

development of the syncretic process of the three religions through the Trần dynasty, during which the *Procedure* was composed and Vietnamese Buddhism played its key role in constructing a Vietnamese cultural and religious identity through the dynamics of religious syncretism.

To interpret how the three religions were inherently compatible, Edward Ch'ien discussed two historical justifications that Chinese syncretists used to claim the common ground of the Three Teachings. The first one was based on the idea that the “Three Teachings” had the “same origin” or shared “one source” (三教同源 *tam giáo đồng nguyên*). The other followed the argument that “different paths” leading to the “same ending” (殊途同歸 *thù đồ đồng quy*).<sup>21</sup> William Chu suggested two more grounds for justifying the inherent compatibility of the three religions in their dynamic interactions. He wrote: “One is that ‘the division of labor constitutes mutual complement’ (*hufu gongcheng* 互輔共成), and the other justification appeals to the notion that different religions not only accomplish the ‘same goal,’ but also do so through comparable soteriological venues (*yiqu tonggong* 異曲同工).”<sup>22</sup>

In the context of the three religions in Vietnam, the justification of “Three Teachings” sharing “one source” (*tam giáo đồng nguyên*) is the most prominent interpretation of the dynamic interactions of the three religions. The other interpretation is “Three Teachings” sharing “same ending” (*tam giáo đồng quy*), which is another expression of “different paths” leading to the “same ending.” In addition, I would like to

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*The Divine Eye and The Diaspora: Vietnamese Syncretism Became Transpacific Caodaism*, which is an important source to understand the dynamics of the syncretism in Caodaism from a transnational perspective.

<sup>21</sup> Ch'ien, *Chiao Hung*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Chu, “Syncretism Reconsidered,” 68.

propose two more grounds on which the dynamic interactions of the Three Teachings in Vietnam can be presented. One is that the “Three Teachings” are in “harmony” (*tam giáo hòa đồng*), and the other emphasizes the differences of the three religions called “Three Teachings” as “three” (*tam giáo đĩnh lập*). Before the formation of the Vietnamese independent state in the tenth century, the major justification of the dynamic interactions of the three religions in Vietnam was *tam giáo đĩnh lập*, meaning that each religion found its ways to mingle into Vietnamese folk religions and gain acceptance. The three religions were considered as three different religious entities in which Buddhism held a more favorable position. During the dynastic period, other historical justifications, i.e., *tam giáo đồng nguyên*, *tam giáo đồng quy*, and *tam giáo hòa đồng*, were used interchangeably.

The following diagrams describe the interactions of the three religions based on the above four historical justifications.

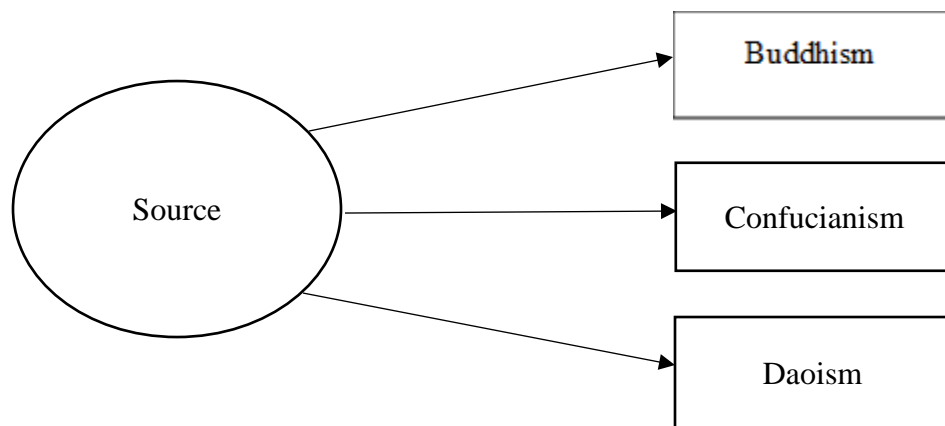


Diagram 1: Three Teachings share “one source” (*Tam giáo đồng nguyên*)

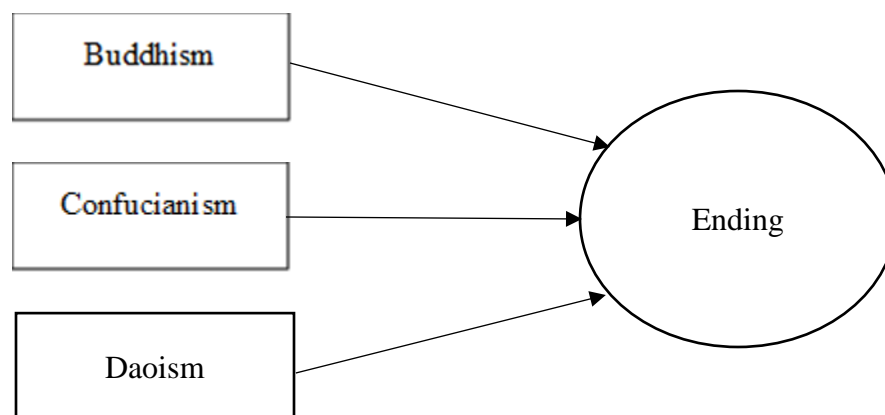


Diagram 2: Three Teachings share “same ending” (*Tam giáo đồng quy*)

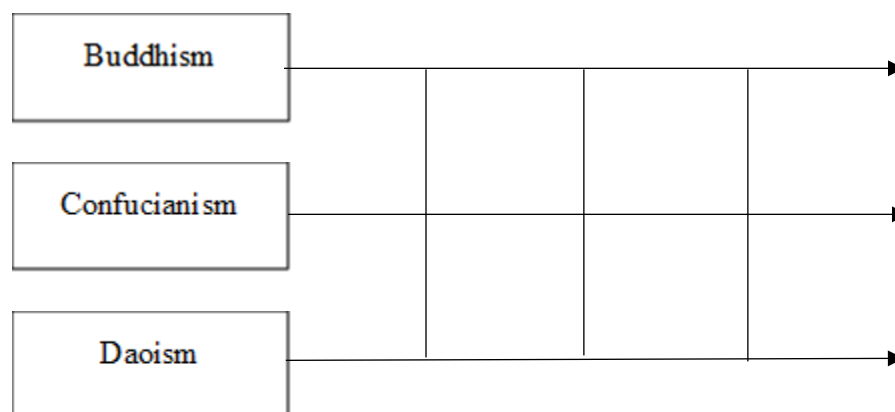


Diagram 3: Three Teachings are in “harmony” (*Tam giáo hòa đồng*)

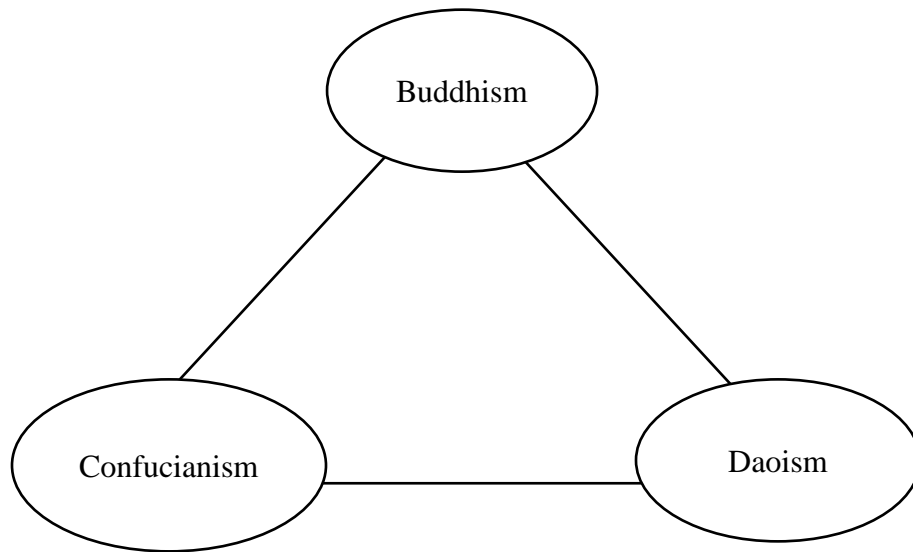


Diagram 4: Three Teachings are as “three” (*Tam giáo đĩnh lập*)

In Vietnamese discourses of the Three Teachings, the metaphors of “source” and “ending” are unspecified and unanalyzed. The Vietnamese syncretists also seem not to question the consistency of the so-called “source” and “ending.” General interpretation of the “source” or “ending” is the *Way* (*Đạo*). The “way” of Confucianism is to become superior men (*quân tử* 君子) by observing Confucian ethical principles. Confucianism was also called “the Way of Humanity” (*nhân đạo* 人道) because it offered a worldly-oriented system of ethics for humanity.<sup>23</sup> Vietnamese Buddhism is strongly influenced by Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism in which the Buddhists’ goal is to liberate from suffering of the six realms of *samsāra* and to ultimately attain Buddhahood. This is called the “way” of Buddhism (*Buddhamārga* or *Phật đạo* 佛道). While philosophical Daoism was often called “the Way of Heaven” (*thiên đạo* 天道),<sup>24</sup> religious Daoists in Vietnam seek

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<sup>23</sup> Duong, “Buddhist Discourse,” 34.

<sup>24</sup> There are three ways to interpret the *Dao* in *Daode jing* 道德經, the classic of Daoism. First, *Dao* is identified with the essence of the universe. Second, *Dao* refers to the operating laws of the universe.

“power in the world of men and spirits and immortality through the performance of various kinds of exercises and magics.”<sup>25</sup> Although each religion interprets the *Way* or *Đạo* differently, it is still considered as the fundamental compatibility of the three religions itself, symbolizing their harmonious co-existence. To the Vietnamese, this fundamental compatibility is more important than differences, competitions, or possible conflicts among the three religions<sup>26</sup> because they believe that this unity makes them strong as an independent nation.

In summary, the co-existence of the three religions in medieval Vietnam has melded within the syncretic tendency of Vietnamese religious traditions due to an intention to define a national and cultural identity. In that manner, each religion has continued to transform itself and interact with other religions in dynamic ways, with

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Third, *Đạo* is the Way of Heaven, referring to the justice way to rule the state and people. See Vũ, *Đạo giáo*, 13-14.

<sup>25</sup> Ho Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics*, 24. In early and medieval Vietnam, religious Daoism or Huang-Lao Daoism was more popular and influential in the daily life of average Vietnamese while Lao-Zhuang Daoism or philosophical Daoism was associated with some high-ranking Buddhist figures like Pháp Thuận (914-990) in his famous poem “Destiny of the Country.” In this poem, Pháp Thuận discussed the concept of “non-action” 無為 in the framework of Unity of Three Teachings in which he took philosophical Daoism as a comparative entity. Other than that, religious Daoism merged into many aspects of the religious life of Vietnamese people, mingling into folk religions and Buddhism.

<sup>26</sup> One may argue that the complaints and critiques of some Confucian scholars such as Đàm Dĩ Mông, Trương Hán Siêu, or Lê Quát over Buddhism in medieval Vietnam were intentional attacks on Buddhism in the service of making Confucianism more influential in the royal courts. Historical sources claimed that the lavish patronage of royal courts on behalf of Buddhism left the state without resources while Buddhist monks committed many perceived corruptions. In my opinion, their critiques’ aim was to strengthen the unification of the country, and to balance influences of different religious traditions. Furthermore, those critiques functioned as an awakening call for Buddhism to reform. To take Trương Hán Siêu (?-1354) as an example: Despite his criticism of Buddhism at a young age, the Trần kings (devout Buddhist kings) appointed him to important ranks within the royal court. In addition, he was also appointed as custodian of a large Buddhist temple. Trương Hán Siêu’s literary works embraced the Buddhist teachings despite having criticized perceived corruptions of Buddhist followers here and there. Among them, we should name *The Stele Inscription of Khai Nguyên Temple* (開嚴寺碑記 *Khai Nghiêm Tự Bi Ký*) and *Stele Inscription of Linh Tế Stupa of the Dục Thúy Mountain* (浴翠山靈濟塔記 *Dục Thúy Sơn Linh Tế Tháp Ký*). In the later stele, Trương Hán Siêu praised the Buddhist teachings and virtuous Buddhist monks such as Phổ Tuệ, an eminent monk of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect. Đàm Dĩ Mông and Lê Quát shared similar attitudes with those of Trương Hán Siêu. Therefore, I would argue that their critiques of Buddhism were not intended to decry Buddhist teachings but were rather an effort to balance the impact of different religions in the royal court, or more specifically, to enhance the role of Confucian scholars in state affairs.



patronages and support of leading political figures throughout the religious history of Vietnam. The patronages of the Vietnamese ruling class and involvement of religious leaders into political affairs are explicit reasons for the unequal ecumenism between the three religions. The bond between religion and politics in the history Vietnam justified syncretism as a tool for unifying all existing religious traditions in harmony. Vietnamese people were not interested in discussing differences or conflicts among religions although they recognized the “unequal ecumenism” between religions. Every Vietnamese person has likely subscribed to some version of wide variation of religious syncretism, including the conflation of the three religions.

## 2. Discourse of the Three Teachings in Vietnam

According to Nguyễn Khắc Thuần, Daoism came to Vietnam after Buddhism and Confucianism the end of the Chinese Eastern Han dynasty (25-220).<sup>27</sup> In 179 BCE, Zhaotuo 趙佗 (Triệu Đà), the King of Nanyue 南越 (Nam Việt) defeated An Dương Vương and began ruling Âu Lạc. This event started the period of “a thousand years of northern domination” (*thời bắc thuộc*) in the history of Vietnam. Confucianism was introduced into Vietnam by the Chinese ruling class with the intention to shape Vietnam in accordance with Chinese cultural model.<sup>28</sup> Buddhist monks propagated Buddhism in early Vietnam via both sea route and land routes.<sup>29</sup> Chinese migrants also brought

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<sup>27</sup> Nguyễn, *Lịch Sử Văn Hoá*, Vol. 2, 328.

<sup>28</sup> Vietnamese historical sources record activities of discussing and propagating Confucian classics of some Chinese governors in early Vietnam such as Tích Quang (r. 1-5), Nhâm Diên (r. 29-33), and Sĩ Nhiếp (r. 187-226). See Lý, “Nho giáo.”

<sup>29</sup> By influence of nationalism, modern Vietnamese scholars have been involved in the debate as to whether Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam earlier than it was propagated to China. The debate began as early as Trần Văn Giáp’s discovery of the *Thiền Uyển* in 1932. Nguyễn Lang states that Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam by late first century CE with Luy Lâu Buddhist center before its propagation in Luoyang and Pengcheng (two earliest Buddhist centers in China). Most Vietnamese scholars have followed

Daoism to Vietnam during this millennium of Chinese domination.<sup>30</sup> Such a historical and political situation suggests that we should study the co-existence of the three religions in early Vietnam in the larger context of Chinese and Vietnamese interactions.

Among the three religions, early Vietnamese people likely preferred Buddhism to the other two religions for its non-Chinese origin. This was probably part of a rebellious mentality against the Chinese domination. Historically, the dynamic interactions of the three religions in early Vietnam mostly focused on the interactions between Buddhism and other two Chinese religions with regard to philosophical and religious perspectives. The *Mouzi's Treatise on the Removal of Doubts* 牟子理惑論 (*Mâu Tử Lý Hoặc Luận*; hereafter the *Removing Doubts*) was the earliest text mentioning the three religions, and was believed to have been written in Jiaozhou.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the six letters between the Jiaozhou Governor Li Miao 李淼/Lý Miếu (the fifth century) and two Vietnamese Buddhist monks namely Đạo Cao 道高 and Pháp Minh 法明 as recorded in *An Anthology on Promoting the Luminous* (*Hongming ji* 弘明集/*Hoàng Minh Tập*) of Sengyou 僧祐

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Nguyễn Lang's proposition without any doubt for two main reasons, i.e., (i) to have a direct link with Indian Buddhism via sea route and (ii) to prove a competitive position of Vietnamese Buddhism with its Chinese encounter. See Nguyễn, *Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, 24. Lê Mạnh Thát even pushes the earliest time of Vietnamese Buddhism back to the second century BCE by digging into Vietnamese folklore. See Lê, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo*, Vol. 1, 26. These assertions are still in dispute and would need more supportive archaeological evidence of the transmission of Buddhism via sea route in Vietnam and Southeast Asian countries.

<sup>30</sup> According to some Vietnamese scholars, Daoism was introduced into Vietnam after Confucianism and Buddhism, regardless of any fixed date. Daoism was often mingled with Buddhism and Vietnamese folk religions, except during the Lý and the Trần dynasties. See Vũ, *Đạo giáo*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> The *Removing Doubts* includes thirty-seven articles, recording the dialogues between Mouzi, a Chinese Buddhist scholar, the Daoist and Confucian critics. It is an important text for understanding the early history of Buddhism in Vietnam. The narrative text was first composed in the second century and some additions were added in the fourth and fifth centuries. Its authorship is attributed to Mouzi (160? - 230?) who was first mentioned in *Thiền Uyển* in the conversation of National Preceptor Thông Biện (d. 1134) and Empress Dowager Phù Thánh Cầm Linh Nhân (d. 1117). According to Thông Biện, Mouzi and Kang Shenghui (d. 280) were the first two patriarchs of Buddhism in Vietnam. For the account of this conversation, see *Thiền Uyển* 20b; Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 129.

(445-518) also reflected polemics among the three religions, especially between Buddhism and Confucianism.<sup>32</sup> Beyond the context of these texts, average Vietnamese people seemed not to differentiate philosophical or religious Daoism. Both Buddhism and popular Daoism, with emphasis on immortality techniques, intertwined into Vietnamese folk religions naturally.

The interpretation of *Three Teachings are separated as “three”* (*tam giáo đĩnh lập*) refers to the interactions through which each religion tried to find appropriate ways to mingle into Vietnamese culture. During this formation period, each of the three religions ideally retained their triangulable position while minor critiques surfaced on occasion for the purpose of enhancing their influences. Although this was a process shared with China, Vietnamese people would likely have promoted peace and harmony instead of polemics, disputes, and conflicts among the three religions. Therefore, the co-existence of the three religions in early Vietnam was quite amicable.

The Preface to the *Removing Doubts* describes the important historical moment when the Chinese migrated to Vietnam and the three religions were brought into the landscape of early Vietnamese religions. It reads:

It happened that, after the death of Emperor Ling (189 C.E.) the world was in disorder. Since only Chiao-chou [a colonial district in the far south] remained relatively peaceful, otherworldly people from the north came en masse and settled there. Many of them practiced the methods of the spirit immortals, abstaining from grains to prolong life. These methods were popular then, but Mou-tzu unceasingly refuted them... he intensified his resolved on the Buddha Tao, both scrutinizing all the five thousand words of the Book of Lao Tzu, imbibing their dark mystery as if they were the essence of the fine wine, and playing on the Five Classics as on a ch'in lute or a reed pipe. The many followers of convention

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<sup>32</sup> For detailed biographies of the three figures (Li Miao, Đạo Cao and Pháp Minh) and the summary of these six letters, see Nguyen, *History of Buddhism*, 50-52.

condemned him, thinking that he had turned his back on the Five Classics and gone over to the heterodox...<sup>33</sup>

Based on this preface, it is safe to say that the three religions flourished in Vietnam as early as the second century, which was roughly the same time when the *Removing Doubts* was composed.

Being inclined to interpret the role of Mouzi as a Buddhist apologist,<sup>34</sup> most Vietnamese Buddhist scholars have not recognized Mouzi's equitable consideration of the syncretic interactions of the three religions in his composition on the *Removing Doubts*. Lê Mạnh Thát described the *Removing Doubts* as downplaying the roles and positions of Confucianism and Daoism in favor of Buddhism.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the work praised the Buddha and his teachings; however, it was not simply an apologetic arguing for Buddhist doctrines over or against the Chinese religions (Confucianism and Daoism). Rather, the focus of the *Removing Doubts* was an interpretation of Chinese religious traditions in such a way that was compatible with Buddhist doctrines. This is more of a cultural and hermeneutical focus than a doctrinal or conceptual emphasis of the text. In the *Removing Doubts*, the Buddha and his teachings are consciously filtered through Chinese patterns of thought with the intention of weaving Buddhism into early Chinese

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<sup>33</sup> Keenan, *How Master Mou*, 52-54.

<sup>34</sup> In the introduction of the English translation of the *Removing Doubts*, Keenan provides a review of the interpretation of the text regarding the idea that "Mou-tzi Li-huo lun is simply a Buddhist apologetic." See Keenan, 8-9. Following this trend, Vietnamese Buddhist scholars have interpreted the text in the same way for the sake of giving Buddhism a higher profile in comparison to other religions that have existed in early Vietnam.

<sup>35</sup> Going beyond the view of Mouzi as a Buddhist apologist, Lê Mạnh Thát suggests that Mouzi studied Buddhism in Vietnam. He wrote: "In other words, he [Mouzi] was a product of Vietnamese Buddhism, and the work *Removing Doubts* could be considered as the first crystalized outcome of such a Buddhist culture." (Nói cách khác, ông là sản phẩm của Phật giáo Việt Nam, và tác phẩm *Lý hoặc luận* có thể nói là một kết tinh đầu tiên của nền Phật giáo đó). This view was also based on nationalistic intention. See Lê, *Mâu Tử*, 16.

and Vietnamese cultures. Therefore, I would argue that the text is the source for the Unity of Three Teachings, in which Buddhism might co-exist with Confucianism and Daoism in a hierarchical order, rather than being simply an apologetically Buddhist text.

Judging the hierarchical order of the three religions in the *Removing Doubts*, Duong Ngoc Dung writes: “religious Taoism (understood as the techniques of immortality) was dismissed outright, philosophical Taoism (Laozi’s ideas) was equated with Buddhism, and Confucianism functioned in a secondary role compared to Taoism and Buddhism.”<sup>36</sup> This hierarchy sometimes appears in the conversation between Buddhism and Confucianism just as in the six letters between Li Miao and the two Vietnamese monks, Đạo Cao and Pháp Minh. In these letters, the two monks claim that Buddhism is superior to Confucianism when the Buddha’s teachings are circulated during the three time periods, while Confucian teachings serve the present life only.

The conceptual hierarchical order of the three religions in early Vietnam remained unchanged for at least the first millennium of Chinese domination. I say “conceptual” because such a hierarchical order of the three religions seemed to be circulating among the learned class, especially those who had contact with the *Removing Doubts* or involvement in the exchange of the six letters between Li Miao and the Jiaozhou monks Đạo Cao and Pháp Minh. With the exception of these two sources, the interaction of the three religions during this early period consisted of merely a handful of shards, and one hesitates to put them all into a complete picture.<sup>37</sup> In summary, we would say the Unity

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<sup>36</sup> Duong, “Buddhist Discourse,” 139.

<sup>37</sup> For instance, there is a legendary image of Shixie/Sĩ Nhiếp, the first governor (*Tiết độ sứ*) of Jiaozhou/Vietnam from 187 to 226 who was spreading both Confucian and Daoist teachings while residing there. He was praised by later historians as the Confucian patriarch of Nam Giao<sup>37</sup> (*Nam Giao học tổ*) for his efforts to propagate Confucianism and introduce Chinese script and culture to Vietnamese people. Shixie was also associated with the contemporary Daoists in Jiaozhou. His death and resurrection were

of Three Teachings in this formation period was the means by which the Three Teachings established their existence in Vietnam (*tam giáo đĩnh lập*).

From the tenth century to the Trần dynasty, the Unity of Three Teachings flourished even under the most distinctly Buddhist-oriented dynasties (the Lý and the Trần). The hierarchical order of the three religions in this period were Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism; and their interactions were more dynamic in comparison with the formation period. We can investigate their dynamic interactions from both historical and textual perspectives.

A few historical events illustrate the dominance of the tendency to harmonize the Three Teachings. Historical records reveal that since the time of the Đinh dynasty (968-980), a religious institution had been formed and there were representatives of Buddhism and Daoism. Three main positions in the religious institution included the President of the Buddhist Saṅgha (*Tăng Thống*), Monk Scribe (*Tăng Lục*) and the High and Upright Daoist Priest (*Sùng Chân Uy Nghi*).

Another occurrence that shows the influences of the three religions in the Vietnamese socio-political system was the appearance of civil service examinations of

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written about by Gehong in his *Biographies of the Immortals* (神仙傳 *Thần tiên truyện*). Gehong believed Shixie was saved by immortal Dongfeng with the help of an elixir. Regardless of the power of the elixir, the story was nevertheless circulated among the Vietnamese community.

After Shixie, Vietnamese history and legend built up a mysterious image of Gaopian/Cao Biền, the governor and army commissioner of Vietnam in the ninth century. He was said to be a sorcerer who performed magic to suppress the dragon spirits in the land of Vietnam. This implied that all revolutions mobilized by the Vietnamese people should be suppressed sooner or later. Simultaneously, Vietnamese people at that time made up different stories and legends regarding the dialogues of Cao Biền and the Vietnamese magicians, deities, and spirits (e.g., God Long Đỗ, Buddhist monk La Quý An, Daoist Tả Ao, and Saint Tản Viên). The common ground of these stories is that Cao Biền was defeated, his amulets were found, and the dragon spirits were released. Therefore, the Vietnamese possibly protected their land and fought against the Chinese hegemony. These accounts have not been certified historically. The nationalism is the main theme of these stories to a greater extent. Nevertheless, they inform the spiritual context of the early history of Vietnam as well as their reactions towards the foreign religions. Venerating spirits and staying open towards foreign religions became a typical attitude of Vietnamese people throughout the history.

the Three Teachings in the second half of the eleventh century, as mentioned in the *Complete Book of Historical Records of Great Việt* (大越史記全書 *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*, hereafter referred to as *Toàn Thư*) and the *Brief History of Việt* (越史略 *Việt Sử Lược* or 大越史略 *Đại Việt Sử Lược*). Six national civil examinations were held during the Lý dynasty to meet specific needs in the country at those times.<sup>38</sup> Despite the fact that they followed the Chinese model, the civil examinations in Vietnam took place in a different way. Beside the Four Books and Five Classics of Confucius, the candidates were also to demonstrate a wide knowledge of Buddhism and Daoism. One of the purposes of the civil examinations of the Three Teachings was to maintain the balance of the three religions in Vietnamese religious and socio-political systems.

Regarding religious establishment, King Lý Thánh Tông (r. 1054-1072) built the Temple of Confucius (Văn Miếu) in 1070 to honor Confucius and other Confucian sages and praiseworthy individuals. The King also built the National Academy (Quốc Tử Giám) in 1076 so that the princes and sons of aristocratic families could study Confucian literature. The Lý kings also supported the building and restoration of both Buddhist and Daoist temples in the capital city as well as in the remote villages. In the *Historical Records of Great Việt* (大越史記 *Đại Việt Sử Ký*), Lê Văn Hưu chronicles that Lý Công Uẩn, after two years on the throne, built eight temples in Thiên Đức district, issued a decree calling for the restoration of Buddhist and Daoist temples in villages, and allowed

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<sup>38</sup> Three of the examinations related to the war with the Chinese Song dated 1075, 1076 and 1077. The exam in 1086 was held for selecting the head of *Hàn Lâm Viện*. The purpose of the exam in 1185 was to select a scholar who was good at poetry. Only the exam of 1195 was held in order to bestow public service positions.

thousands of people to be ordained.<sup>39</sup> These accounts confirm that Vietnamese rulers skillfully maintained the harmony between the three religions as a means to consolidating all walks of life in service of the fledgling government.

The collection of the *Essays* of Trần Thái Tông is one of the more popular works that represents the traditional syncretism of the three religions. For instance, in the *Essay on the Precept of [Non-]Killing* (戒殺生文 *Giới Sát Sinh Văn*), the King remarked how the Three Teachings incline people to the goodness by writing: “Confucian classics teach us benevolence and kindness, Daoist scriptures teach us to love the lives of all beings including the animals, Buddhism advocates the teaching of non-harming.”<sup>40</sup> This quote clearly shows Trần Thái Tông’s intention to harmonize the three religions in terms of their scriptures. On the *Treaties on Meditation Practices* 坐禪論 (*Toạ Thiền Luận*), Trần Thái Tông chooses popular figures to emphasize the practical aspects of the three religions. He wrote:

Shakyamuni Buddha enters the Snow Mountain (i.e., Himalayas) and sits in meditation for six years. He remains in his position calmly while the magpie birds build their nest above his head and the grass grows through his thighs. Ziji leans on the chair, his body looks like a dry tree, and his mind like the cold ashes. Yanhui also sits and forgets his body. He abandons his judgments, renounces [the differentiations between] wisdom and ignorance, and [seems] to be integrating with the great *Dao*. In the old days, the Three Teachings’ sages succeed because of practicing meditation.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 1, 250.

<sup>40</sup> *Nho điển thi nhân bố đức. Đạo kinh ái vật hiếu sinh. Phật duy giới sát thị trì.* 儒典施仁布德。道經愛物好生。佛惟戒殺是持。 (*Essays*: 17a-b).

<sup>41</sup> *Thích Ca Văn Phật nhập vu Tuyết sơn, đoan toạ lục niên. Thước sào đỉnh thượng. Thảo xuyên vu bề. Thân tâm tự nhược. Tử Cơ ẩn kỳ nhi toạ, hình như khô mộc, tâm tự tử hôi. Nhan Hồi toạ vong, huy chi thể, truất thông minh, lý ngu trí, đồng ư đại đạo.* 釋迦文佛入于雪山。端坐六年。鵲巢頂上。草穿于脰。身心自若。子綦隱几而坐。形如枯木。心似死灰。顏回坐忘。隳肢體。黜聰明。離愚智。同於大道。 (*Essays*: 24b-25a).



The interesting point in this quote is that Trần Thái Tông implies that meditation is the common ground of the three religions. In other words, meditation practice is the way to resolve all differences of the Three Teachings. In addition, Trần Thái Tông further justifies the role of Confucian scholars as promoting Buddhism in the mundane world in his *Preface to the Guide to Thiền Buddhism* (禪宗指南序 *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam Tự*).

From these essays, we can see Trần Thái Tông's effort to balance and bring the three religions to the same ground. His interpretation of the Unity of Three Teachings would be *tam giáo hòa đồng* or *tam giáo đồng nguyên* although he never mentions these terms in his writings.<sup>42</sup> The common ground for the Three Teachings, according to Trần Thái Tông, is meditation practice. While the *Essays* is a Buddhist collection, Trần Thái Tông seems never to neglect the role of Daoist priests and Confucian sages as well as their scriptures. This is an intensive effort to harmonize the co-existence of the Three Teachings. Syncretism is indeed a salient characteristic of the *Essays*. Trần Thái Tông is not only supporting the theory of Unity of Three Teachings, but also harmonizing different forms of Buddhist teachings and practices. I will provide a detailed discussion of this syncretic feature in the following chapters of this dissertation.

### III. Confession and Repentance

#### 1. On Terminology

According to Yijing (635-713), confession (*phát lộ*) is an act of disclosing one's own misdeeds and making a declaration of what transgressions one has committed in the past, "in order to rectify the past and prevent the future transgressions with perfect

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<sup>42</sup> Trần Thái Tông's view on harmony of the three religions was influenced by that of Viên Chiếu (999-1090). In the *Thiền Uyển*, there is a conversation between Viên Chiếu and a monk in which he claims the purpose of these religions is to serve humanity despite their differences of application, just like the sunlight for the day and the moonlight for the night. See Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 116.

sincerity and earnest self-reproach.”<sup>43</sup> The confession of King Ajātasattu to the Buddha is recorded in the very end of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, which is considered the earliest evidence of confessional activity in Pāli Buddhism.<sup>44</sup> It is said:

Venerable sir, a transgression overcame me. I was so foolish, so deluded, so unskillful that for the sake of rulership I took the life of my own father, a righteous man and a righteous king. Let the Exalted One acknowledge my transgression as a transgression for the sake of my restraint in the future.<sup>45</sup>

Then the Buddha continued the conversation as he acknowledged the King’s transgression as a transgression and encouraged him to make amends for it according to the Dharma and practice restraint in the future. Following such a formula, Attwood found other thirteen occurrences that are mentioned throughout the Pāli Nikāyas and Vinaya.<sup>46</sup> Many commentarial passages are also connected to this confessional procedure. There is a wide range of confessants in these early texts, ranging from royalty to common people, non-Buddhist practitioners, and Buddhist monastics. This shows that confession was an essential activity for both monastics and the laity during the early stages of Buddhism.

The liturgy of confession is based on the fortnightly recitation of the Prātimokṣa/Pātimokkha from early Buddhism in India. Although both the monastics and laity could make confessions, the liturgy of confession on the Uposatha/Posaḍha day is

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<sup>43</sup> Li, *Buddhist Monastic Traditions*, 85.

<sup>44</sup> Pettazzoni, *La Confessione des Preches*, 55-62; Attwood, “King Ajātasattu Confess,” 278-307; and Christian, “Revealing Wrongs” 79-90.

<sup>45</sup> Bhikku Bodhi, *The Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, 36-37. The gāthā in Pāli is said: “accayo maṃ bhante accagamā yathābālaṃ yathāmūlhaṃ yathā akusalaṃ yoham pitaram dhamikaṃ dhamarājanaṃ issariyakāraṇā jīvata voropesiṃ. Tassa me bhante bhagavā accayaṃ accayato paṭigganhātu āyatiṃ saṃvarāya.”

<sup>46</sup> Attwood, “King Ajātasattu Confess,” 278-307.

strictly for monastics.<sup>47</sup> The Pāli Vinaya explains that “for the recitation of the Pātimokkha, it must be the right day, there must be a minimum of four bhikkhus, the bhikkhu present must not be guilty of the same offence, and no unsuitable person should be present.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, it is highly probable that the laity are absent in the bimonthly Uposatha ceremonies of the Buddhist Saṅgha in both Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism. In this dissertation, the word “confession” refers to “the confession of transgressions/offences” and the “liturgy of confession” is another expression of the fortnightly recitation of the Prātimokṣa.

Repentance is an English translation of the Chinese *chanhui* (*sám hói*) derived from the Sanskrit *kṣāma*. *Chanhui* is a hybrid term<sup>49</sup> which was well-deliberated by both Chinese adepts and modern scholars.<sup>50</sup> The earlier translation of *kṣāma* into Chinese is *huiguo* (*hói quá*)-“to regret the transgressions that one has committed,” and this term was shifted to *chanhui*-“to repent” around the fifth century in China.<sup>51</sup> The term continues to be used up to the present day in East Asian Buddhism. Vietnamese Buddhism, to a great

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<sup>47</sup> Haskett is against this view in his dissertation. He argued that the laity also participated in these ceremonies during the earliest period of Buddhism. See Haskett, “Revealing Wrongs,” 79-90.

<sup>48</sup> Norman, *Pātimokkha*, xlv.

<sup>49</sup> The direct transliteration of *kṣāma* into Chinese is *chanmo* 懺摩 (*sám ma*). The first character *chan* 懺 “to repent” was added with the indigenous Chinese word *hui* 悔 “to regret/to be remorseful about.”

<sup>50</sup> The transformation of the word *chanhui* was discussed by both Xuanying 玄應 (596~644-646~695) in the *Pronunciation and Meaning in the Sutra Piṭaka* 一切經音義 (T. no. 2128, vol. 54, p.389), Daoxuan (596-667) in the *Petition of the Four-Part Vinaya* 四分律疏 (X. no. 731, vol. 41, p.594), and Yijing 義淨 (635-713) in *A Record of the Inner Law Sent Home from the South Seas* 南海寄歸內法傳 (T. no. 2125, vol. 54, p.217c-d). For modern scholarship, see more Williams, “Mea Maxima Vikalpa,” 7; Li, “Confession Liturgy,” 2009, 18-22. Hong, “Development of Buddhist Repentance,” 2014, note 19, 6.

<sup>51</sup> Williams, “Mea Maxima Vikalpa,” 7. Williams further describes the hybrid nature of the word *chanhui*, which is the combination of the *chan* from the abbreviation of *kṣāma*-“forbearance” or “patient” and the Chinese word *hui*- “to regret”. This abbreviation of *kṣāma* is thus found in combination with another concept such as *li* 禮 (ritual), creating the word *lichen* 禮懺 (repentance ritual or liturgy), as we can see in numerous Mahāyāna scriptures in East Asian Buddhist traditions.

extent, adopts many terms and concepts from the Chinese counterpart, and the word “repentance” is also not an exception. In this study, the term “repentance” will be used to indicate the *chanhui* or *sám hói* scriptures and practices in Chinese and Vietnamese Mahāyāna Buddhism.

As early as the first century BCE, a number of repentance texts were composed in Sanskrit alongside the formation of Mahāyāna scriptures, such as the *Triskandhaka*, the *Ugraparipṛccha Sūtra*, the *Upāliparipṛccha Sūtra*, and several others.<sup>52</sup> The *Triskandhaka* is believed to have been one of the earliest texts to provide a basic procedure of the later Mahāyāna repentance rituals that were composed in China.<sup>53</sup> By the second century CE, they were gradually translated into Chinese in the process of Sinification or Sinicization of Buddhism. The *King Ajātaśatru Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha* 佛說阿闍世王經<sup>54</sup> and the *Śāriputra Repentance Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha* 佛說舍利弗悔過經<sup>55</sup> were two more of the earliest translations of the repentance scriptures from this early stage of Chinese Buddhism. From the second century to the sixth century CE, there were approximately sixty-one repentance scriptures translated, composed, and practiced in China.<sup>56</sup> From the sixth century to the late Tang and Song dynasties, repentance rituals were well-developed in accordance with different sectarian traditions in medieval China, for example: Zhiyi’s 智顗 *Vaipulya Samādhi Repentance*

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<sup>52</sup> Nattier, *Few Good Men*, 45.

<sup>53</sup> Barnes, “Triskandha,” 1-10.

<sup>54</sup> *Foshuo Asheshiwang jing* 佛說阿闍世王經, T. no. 626 (nos. 627-629), vol. 15.

<sup>55</sup> *Foshuo Shelifu huiguo jing* 佛說舍利弗悔過經, T. no.1492, vol. 24.

<sup>56</sup> Shi, *Tiantai chanfa zhi yanjiu* 天台懺法之研究, 82-85.

*Ritual* 方等三昧行法<sup>57</sup> and the *Lotus Samādhi Repentance Ritual* 法華三昧懺儀<sup>58</sup> of the Tiantai 天台 school, Zongmi's 宗密 *Manual of Cultivation and Realization in the Ritual Site according to the Sūtra of Perfect Awakening* 圓覺經道場修證儀<sup>59</sup> of Huayan 華嚴 school, Zunshi's 遵式 *Repentant and Prayer Liturgy for the Rebirth in the Pure Land* 往生淨土懺願儀<sup>60</sup> of the Pure Land school. These repentance rituals seemed to cross sectarian borderlines after the collapse of the scholastic schools due to the Buddhist persecution of Emperor Wuzong of the Tang in 842-845.

## 2. Categories of Repentance Scriptures

There are several ways to categorize Chinese and Vietnamese repentance texts. Zhiyi 智顗 (538-597) was one of the earliest figures who categorized repentance rituals into two types, namely noumenal repentance 理懺, and phenomenal repentance 事懺.<sup>61</sup> Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667) inherited Zhiyi's categories and further added a third type of repentance rituals: precepts-governed repentance 律懺.<sup>62</sup> The classifications of Zhiyi and Daoxuan, to some extent, have laid a foundation for later writers and commentators on repentance. Thích Thiện Hoa inherited both Zhiyi and Daoxuan's categories. He introduced to Vietnamese Buddhists four kinds of repentance rituals grouped into two

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<sup>57</sup> *Fangdeng sanmei xingfa* 方等三昧行法, T. no. 1940, vol. 46.

<sup>58</sup> *Fahua sanmei chanyi* 法華三昧懺儀, T. no. 1941, vol. 46.

<sup>59</sup> *Yuanjue jing daochang xiuchengyi* 圓覺經道場修證儀, X. no. 1475, vol. 74.

<sup>60</sup> *Wangsheng jingtu chanyuan yi* 往生淨土懺願儀, X. no. 1161, vol. 61.

<sup>61</sup> *Moho zhiguan* 摩訶止觀, T. no. 1911, vol. 46, p.14a18-a21.

<sup>62</sup> *Sifen lu shanfan buque xingshi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, T. no. 1804, vol. 40, p.96a.28-29.

main categories, called phenomenal repentance 事懺 (*sự sám*) and noumenal repentance 理懺 (*lý sám*), which were performed by both monastics and the laity in 1953.<sup>63</sup> The category of phenomenal repentance includes three forms of repentance activities, i.e., (i) repentance by performing rituals 作法懺悔 (*tác pháp sám hối*), (ii) repentance by observing auspicious signs 取相懺悔 (*thủ tướng sám hối*), and (iii) the repentance of recitation and prostration of eighty-eight Buddhas 洪名懺悔 (*hồng danh sám hối*). The noumenal repentance is a group of repentance rituals emphasizing the nature of emptiness of both merits and offenses. This type of repentance rituals is called repentance by contemplating non-arising 無生懺悔 (*vô sanh sám hối*) or formless repentance 無相懺悔 (*vô tướng sám hối*).

David W. Chappell categorizes five kinds of repentance rituals: “communal repentance to the Saṅgha to ensure monastic conformity, personal repentance of karmic history, mythological repentance to a supramundane Buddha, meditation repentance of incorrect perceptions and attachments, and philosophical repentance of wrong concepts and discriminations.”<sup>64</sup> De Hong divides repentance rituals into three types: communal repentance 作法懺悔, visionary or auspicious sign repentance 觀相懺悔 and formless repentance 無生懺悔/無相懺悔.<sup>65</sup> Wang Juan classifies them into three kinds: (i) daily-based repentance texts such as *Writing of Repentance on the Six Sensory Faculties* 六根

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<sup>63</sup> Thích, *Phật Học Phổ Thông*, Vol. 1, 95-96.

<sup>64</sup> Chappell, *Formless Repentance*, 253.

<sup>65</sup> Hong, “Compassionate Water Repentance Ritual,” 4-8, and “Development of Buddhist Repentance Rituals,” 8-12. It is highly possible that Hong’s classification is based on the discussion of Shi Darui in *Tiantai chanfa zhi yanjiu* 天台懺法之研究, 56-58.

懺悔文, the *Prajñā Repentance Text* 般若懺文 among many others; (ii) communal repentance rituals, which are performed by a group of devotees in a communal setting such as the *Twelve Light Repentance Liturgy* 十二光禮 or the *Vajracchedikā Repentance Liturgy* 金剛五禮; and (iii) repentance texts consisting of both rituals and literary commentaries, such as the *Lotus Samādhi Repentance Ritual* 法華三昧懺儀 and the *Manual of Cultivation and Realization in the Ritual Site according to the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment* 圓覺經道場修證儀.<sup>66</sup>

Repentance practice has a long history of development in Vietnam. Aside from some repentance texts composed by Vietnamese practitioners such as the *Procedure* and Pháp Thuận's lost text, entitled the *Repentant Writing that Invokes the Bodhisattva's name* (菩薩號懺悔文 *Bồ Tát Hiệu Sám Hối Văn*), Chinese repentance rituals were used, translated, and performed in Vietnamese Buddhist monasteries. Observing the repentance practice in Vietnamese Buddhism, I propose the categorization of three types of repentance rituals: (i) daily-based repentance texts as in the case of the *Procedure*; (ii) repentance rituals that focus mostly on the prostration of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, such as the *Recitation and Prostration of Eighty-eight Buddhas* (*Hồng Danh Bửu Sám*), or the *Sūtra of 10,000 Buddhas* (*Kinh Vạn Phật*); and (iii) repentance rituals that include both recitation and prostration of Buddhas, such as the *Jeweled Repentance of Emperor Liang* 梁皇寶懺 (*Lương Hoàng Bảo Sám* - hereafter LHBS)<sup>67</sup> and the *Compassionate Water Repentance* 慈悲水懺 (*Từ Bi Thủy Sám* - hereafter TBTS).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Wang, *Dunhuang lichanwen yanjiu* 敦煌禮懺文研究, 2-11.

<sup>67</sup> *Lianghuang baochan* 梁皇寶懺, T. no. 1919, vol. 45, and Vietnamese Translations of Thích Viên Giác (1960) and Thích Trí Quang (c. 1960s-1970s).

### 3. Frameworks of Eradicating Transgressions

There are two general rubrics of the eradication of transgressions that are made from the ten unwholesome karmas and the six sensory faculties and grouped into three karmic sources, namely body, speech, and mind.<sup>69</sup> The two rubrics are popular in Chinese and Vietnamese karmic repentance rituals. The emphasis of karmic repentance rituals is not on identifying the actual offenses that one has committed, but rather on assuming all possible offenses that one has committed since beginningless time.

These are generated from a variety of Mahāyāna repentance scriptures regardless of school or sect. For example, the *Sūtra on Contemplation of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Method of Cultivation Spoken by the Buddha* 佛說觀普賢菩薩行法經,<sup>70</sup> and chapter 40 of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* 大方廣佛華嚴經<sup>71</sup> record the following verses:

In the past I have committed all sorts of unwholesome karmas,  
In all cases because of greed, aversion, and delusion from the beginningless time,  
Via the body, speech, and mind from which [transgressions] are generated,  
I am now repenting them all.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *Cibei dao Zhang chan fa* 慈悲道場懺法, T. no. 1909, vol. 45, *Cibei shuichan fa* 慈悲水懺法, T. no. 1910, vol. 45, and Vietnamese Translations of Thích Huyền Dung (1968) and Thích Trí Quang (c. 1960s-1970s).

<sup>69</sup> The ten unwholesome karmas (daśakuśalakarma 十惡業) are harming, stealing, adultery, lying, duplicity, fabricated language and coarse language, greed, anger, and perverse views. They are grouped into three categories in accordance with the body (the first three), the speech (the next four) and the mind (the last three). The six faculties (ṣaḍindraya 六根) are eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. For more information about the confession and repentance in Chinese Buddhism and its limited research, see Williams, “Mea Maxima Vikalpa,” 7-16.

<sup>70</sup> *Foshuo guan Puxian pusa xingfa jing* 佛說觀普賢菩薩行法經 T. no. 277, vol. 9.

<sup>71</sup> *Da fangguang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經, T. no. 279, vol. 10.

<sup>72</sup> 我昔所造諸惡業 皆由無始貪嗔痴  
從身語意之所生 一切我今皆懺悔

The four verses are found in most Buddhist chanting manuals in Chinese and Vietnamese languages available nowadays. It was translated from gāthā 8, chapter 56 of *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, read: *yacca kṛtaṃ mayi pāpu bhāveyyā rāgatu dveṣatu mohavaśena, kāyatu vāca manena tathaiva taṃ pratideśayamī ahu sarvam*.



Thus, all sorts of unwholesome karmas are committed through the channels of the body, speech, and mind, which includes the six faculties, and are in themselves are obvious phenomena in Mahāyāna repentance scriptures.<sup>73</sup> These two rubrics of eradicating transgressions appear as an all-encompassing framework in the *Procedure*.

Some other formulaic rubrics such as the five heinous offenses and the four *pārājikas* also appear in Mahāyāna repentance scriptures. However, Trần Thái Tông ignores these two frameworks in his *Procedure*, the main text of this study. Therefore, the dissertation will disregard the discussion of the repentance of the five heinous offenses and the four *pārājikas*. Instead, I investigate the Vietnamese repentance rituals in the frameworks of the ten unwholesome karmas and the six sense faculties in Chapter Six of the study.

#### IV. Previous Scholarship

The sources for this study contain two main themes: (1) Translations and studies of the *Essays* and (2) Studies related to Chinese and Vietnamese repentance rituals.

##### 1. On the *Essays*

In comparison with other Buddhist traditions in Vietnam, Thiền literature is more prolific and well-preserved. Lê Mạnh Thát's three volumes of the *Complete Collections of Vietnamese Buddhist Literature (Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam)*<sup>74</sup> is an important project that recollected and analyzed many Buddhist texts available in medieval Vietnam in close readings with the Chinese literary records. In addition, he also

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<sup>73</sup> In fact, the perfection of the six sensory faculties as well as three karmic sources (actions, speech, and thoughts) is one of the fundamental teachings of Buddhism. This is well illustrated in the Saṃyutta Nikāya and its Āgama counterpart. See Choong, *Fundamental Teachings*, 75-107.

<sup>74</sup> Lê, *Văn Học Phật Giáo*.

wrote the *Complete Collection of Trần Thái Tông* (*Toàn Tập Trần Thái Tông*) in a way that is completely different from the previous scholarship on the King's *Essays*. Lê Mạnh Thát's noteworthy contribution is to portray the whole picture of Trần Thái Tông from different angles as a political figure, and as a poet and a devout Buddhist by looking at sources beyond the King's *Essays*, including several of his poems as collected in *A Collection of Poetry in Vietnamese Syllable* (*Việt Âm Thi Tập*), *Poetry and Literary Works of the Lý-Trần Dynasties* (*Thơ Văn Lý Trần*) and some other places, as well as his petition to the Chinese emperor as recorded by Lê Tắc in *A Brief History of Annam* (*An Nam Chí Lược*). Lê Mạnh Thát also provided some valuable corrections for the translation and study of the *Essays* by the Literature Institute [of Vietnam] (Viện Văn Học), which he took as the foundation for his new translation and analysis of the text. By looking at the King as a historical figure, Lê Mạnh Thát interpreted the King's religious ideas and practices in a harmonious way with both Buddhist practitioners and secular scholars. This makes Vietnamese scholarship on the King's *Essays* turn in a new direction.

Before Lê Mạnh Thát, there were two tendencies in the translation of and commentary on the *Essays*. There is the Buddhist interpretation, in which Trần Thái Tông was represented as a devout Buddhist practitioner whose works are distinctive of Vietnamese Buddhist theories and practices. This tendency is expressed in the works of Thiều Chửu, Thích Thanh Kiểm, Thích Nhất Hạnh, Thích Thanh Từ and Đức Nhuận. There is also the solely literary approach of Đào Duy Anh and a group of scholars of Viện Văn Học, who have a unilateral understanding of Buddhist teachings and practices. These views led yielded a number of errors in interpretation of the text that Lê Mạnh Thát

also mentions in his work. Notwithstanding, due to the ambitious scope of the study, Lê Mạnh Thát does not dedicate significant attention to the repentance rituals and their functions according to the King's philosophy and the repentance practice in medieval Vietnam, these I will cover broadly in my project.

In fact, most Vietnamese scholars on the *Essays* have not paid significant attention to the *Procedure* due to two reasons. Firstly, they consider the repentance activities depicted in the *Essays* and among Vietnamese Thiền literary compositions as only a minor part of the King's ideas and practices. Secondly, they recognize that this form of repentance ritual was not so popular after the fall of the Trần dynasty and the decline of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect. By that time, Vietnam was again under the control of the Chinese Ming dynasty, which introduced a new form of devotionism that included the performance of repentance rituals and the recitation of Mahāyāna sūtras. The *Procedure* was reintroduced again by the early twentieth century with several translations of the *Essays* during the so-called revival movement-during the 1970s-of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect of the Trần by Thích Thanh Từ.

Dung Ngoc Duong's *Buddhist Discourses in Traditional Vietnam* is the only relevant work discussing on the *Essays* of Trần Thái Tông, and it provides some translations of essays into English. His study in many ways has inspired me and shaped my research topic. He states that the "excessive reliance on a narrow range of Chinese sources has limited the rational and hermeneutical for Vietnamese Buddhist intellectuals."<sup>75</sup> Duong Ngoc Dung's research suggests a new approach to Vietnamese Buddhism by engaging in dialogues with the sophisticated philosophical traditions of

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<sup>75</sup> Duong, "Buddhist Discourse," vii–viii.

India and Tibet as well as the Western rational theories. Since the work focuses more on the philosophical and theoretical aspects, Dung Ngoc Duong limits his discussion on the *Procedure* and barely mentions the practical aspect of the *Essays* itself. This pushes me to want to rethinking the unique character of Vietnamese Buddhism as reflected in the *Essays* and Vietnamese repentance practices. By reading the text closely, I realize that Trần Thái Tông highly appreciates the repentance performance, and he believes the practice of the *Procedure* would lead one to the eradication of one's transgressions so that the Awakening can be obtained.

## 2. On Repentance

Repentance ritual is a significant feature of Vietnamese Buddhist belief and practice. Nevertheless, it has never been a serious research topic in Vietnamese scholarships. Trian Nguyen<sup>76</sup> is the first scholar introducing Vietnamese repentance rituals into the scholarly discourse. Trian Nguyen's article has touched on certain key ideas regarding Vietnamese repentance activities for Buddhists before their deaths, as well as the foundational repentance rituals that are performed among Vietnamese Buddhist monastics and laity in the context of Trần Thái Tông's *Essays* and Chuyết Công's *Five Essential Meanings of Awakened Mind* (五种菩提要義 *Ngũ Chứng Bồ Đề Yếu Nghĩa*). Trian Nguyen argues that the five steps for practice during the moribund period, as mentioned by Chuyết Công in his work, are widely applied in Vietnamese Buddhist practice, and with the dedication. The repentance performance in Trian Nguyen's work falls under the umbrella of Vietnamese Pure Land tradition, which is the most relevant tradition in the Vietnamese religious milieu nowadays. In fact, such a

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<sup>76</sup> Nguyen, "At the Deathbed."

practice is observed by all Vietnamese Buddhists regardless of school or sect. This again illustrates the synthesized nature of Vietnamese Buddhism throughout its transcultural history. This study does consider the Chinese elements in Vietnamese Buddhism, but I am interested in how Vietnamese Buddhism understands its religious identity in the context of religious syncretism. Therefore, Trian Nguyen's article, to some extent, helps me to strengthen my argument on how the repentance rituals cross the sectarian borderlines in Vietnamese Buddhism.

In reading the *Procedure* in the context of the Vietnamese Buddhist repentance genre, the studies on the TBTS and the scholarship on Chinese Buddhist repentance rituals are great sources for close reading, analyzing and reflecting on the Vietnamese repentance rituals and practices. Among this group, De Hong's works<sup>77</sup> provide an informative contribution to my project on how the repentance performance was rooted in a social environment and interacted with other indigenous religions and beliefs.

In addition, Williams<sup>78</sup> and Greene<sup>79</sup> provide two noteworthy dissertations investigating the soteriological dimensions of Buddhist repentance rituals in terms of performance and performativity as well as the relationship between repentance rituals and meditative practices. This relationship is also highlighted in Trần Thái Tông's *Procedure* despite the temporal and spatial distance between the King's repentance rituals and those from China. These two works thus offer a suggestive hermeneutical lens-performance and performativity-that is considered in my study.

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<sup>77</sup> Hong, "Compassionate Water Repentance Ritual," 2011; and "Development of Repentance Rituals," 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Williams, "Mea Maxima Vikalpa," 2002.

<sup>79</sup> Greene, "Meditation, Repentance, and Visionary Experience," 2012.

Additionally, the two rubrics in Chinese repentance rituals, namely the ten unwholesome karmas and the six faculties, as suggested by Williams, is applied in analyzing the *Procedure*. In the process of reading, observing, and practicing the repentance manual written by Trần Thái Tông, I discovered that this is not only a repentance ritual but also a literary work, as well as a moving admonition for practitioners. In response to the admonition, they are given the chance to reflect upon and repent their karmic transgressions committed by the six faculties. In this way, they absorb into the action of purification, rather than utilize a performance ritual, as is seen in some other repentance rituals discussed by Williams and Greene. The text also depicts the development of Buddhism during the Trần dynasty and describes personal challenges of the King as a sincere practitioner. This daily repentance ritual, together with Thiền meditation and Pure Land's recitation of the Amitābha Buddha's name, constitute the three main pillars of the King's practice. It is possible to interpret the *Procedure* as a preparation for higher practice, as well as a devotional practice that could lead the practitioner to the final goal of liberation. This dissertation will uncover these two interpretations as depicted in the text within the frameworks of the King's *Essays*.

## **V. Outline of Chapters**

The dissertation comprises seven chapters including the introduction and conclusion. Chapter One introduces three main themes: religious syncretism and identity, the blending of different religious traditions in Vietnam, and a brief introduction to confession and repentance scriptures and practices in Vietnamese Buddhism. The three themes are foundations of detailed discussions in following chapters of the study.

In the next five chapters, I group them into two main parts. Part I, comprising Chapter Two and Chapter Three, is concerned with a historical context of Vietnamese Buddhism and the biography of Trần Thái Tông, the author of the *Essays*. Chapter Two is a continued investigation of the paradigm of syncretism in Vietnamese Buddhism. The exploration of this paradigm will shed light on how Buddhism becomes Vietnamese Buddhism. In other words, the paradigm of religious syncretism plays a significant role in shaping Vietnamese Buddhist identity. This process, when discussed thoroughly, would show many layers of syncretic transformations within Vietnamese Buddhism and the blending of Buddhism with Vietnamese folk religions.

In such a historical context, Chapter Three provides a detailed discussion of the life and works of Trần Thái Tông. In his biography, I investigate four important events: (i) the enthronement, (ii) his attempt to renunciate, (iii) the leadership of Trần Thái Tông in the first Đại Việt–Mongol war, and (iv) his abdication. The four events portray Trần Thái Tông in the roles of either a political ruler or a religious leader. The detailed investigation is based on Vietnamese historical accounts, as well as extant Buddhist writings including the King's *Essays*. The in-depth review of Trần Thái Tông's life and his literary works illustrates how religious syncretism influences a Vietnamese Buddhist author in general.

Part II includes Chapter Four, Five and Six, and is concerned with the textual study of the *Essays*, i.e., the translation and analysis of the *Procedure* in comparison with other relevant repentance scriptures in Vietnam. Chapter Four deals with the textual development of the *Essays*, the whole collected works of Trần Thái Tông. In this chapter, I examine three extant editions and eight different translations of the *Essays* into the

modern Vietnamese writing system. The aim of this survey is to confirm the relevance of the *Essays* among Vietnamese Buddhist literature. In addition, the existence of the *Procedure* in all extant editions of the *Essays* is one of the reasons to identify a possible practice of this repentance method and to explain why some Buddhists and scholars have considered the *Essays* as a Buddhist sūtra.

Chapter Five is a complete translation of the *Procedure* into the English language. The translation includes the original Chinese text, the English translation, and the annotation of Buddhist idioms, expressions, and religious concepts, as well as the comparison of the original text from three extant editions in the footnotes. This arrangement was in part inspired by the format of modern Vietnamese translations of the *Essays*, especially those of Nguyễn Đăng Thục and Viện Văn Học in the collection of *Thơ Văn Lý Trần*. In preparing the English translation of the *Procedure*, I have chosen the middle way, producing an interpretation that is neither overly literal nor overly free. Following the original classical Chinese text too closely would result a redundant and clumsy expression in English. On the contrary, rendering a loose reading in English would yield a translation that lacks the literary meaning and poetic rhythm of the classical Chinese text. Consequently, I have tried to retain and convey the essential meanings of the original Chinese text and to express them in a readable English translation.

Chapter Six provides a detailed analysis of the *Procedure* in close readings with two other Vietnamese repentance rituals, namely the LHBS and TBTS. The *Procedure* is examined in terms of its structure or model of repentance performance for the six intervals of the day along with two rubrics of eradicating transgressions that are dominant in Vietnamese repentance scriptures, as well as the transformation of the *Procedure* from



a personal repentance practice to a bi-monthly repentance ritual in Neo-Trúc Lâm Thiền school from the time of the late twentieth century. Examination of the *Procedure* involves sketching out the development of repentance scriptures and practices in Vietnamese Buddhism. However, the existence of the *Procedure* itself might also be revealed to contain reconstructed components of repentance rituals of the six sense faculties from Mahāyāna Buddhism. This will come to light when the chapter investigates the *Procedure* along with three fragments of *Dunhuang* repentance writings that belong to the same genre of repentance of the six sense faculties.

Chapter Seven concludes with a summary of the research with an emphasis on the syncretic character of Vietnamese Buddhism. I also offer some suggestions for further studies related to the *Essays* and Vietnamese Buddhism.

## **VI. Notation**

Problems of terminology always exists in English-language research on the Vietnamese history because of the differences in the understanding of terms, their scopes and validity. Most generalized terms such as “state,” “nation,” “history,” “culture,” “religion” or “philosophy” come from a Western historical context which is loosely fitted to the historical context of other parts of the world. In this study, these terms are relatively synchronic abstractions serving as convenient shorthand labels rather than realities.

Similarly, other terms such as “Confucianism,” “Buddhism,” and “Daoism” are also not applied in the rigid sense of their religious meanings. Like Durkheim and Eliade, I use the concept of the sacred as the essential meaning of religion for which Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism fit the category. The term “Three Teachings” and

“three religions” are interchangeable in this study when I discuss their co-existence or unity as the traditional syncretism of religion.

Another issue of terminology regarding to the study of the Vietnamese past is the long and complicated relationship between China and Vietnam. During the one thousand years of Chinese domination (111 BCE – 939 CE), the Vietnam as we known now was a part of China. After the victory of Ngô Quyền in 938, Vietnam entered a period of independence. This period lasted almost another thousand years until the French colonized Vietnam in 1884. Different Vietnamese dynastic houses took Chinese socio-political institutions as their examples. The influence of Chinese culture on Vietnamese culture was inevitable. However, modern scholars of Vietnam have tried to draw a line between Chinese and Vietnamese cultures, believing that every culture is unique in and of itself regardless how much it has learned and interacted with other cultures.

The names “China” and “Vietnam” that we know now are inextricable from the nationalistic concepts indicating specific ethnic groups, separate geographical boundaries, and distinct cultural systems. Prior to the postcolonial era, the way Vietnamese and Chinese people identified their state names, socio-political institutions, or religious and cultural interactions were cast in a different worldview. Terms like “Northern Kingdom” (Bắc Quốc), “Esteemed Kingdom” (Thượng Quốc) or “Inner Land” (Nội Địa) refers to China while “Southern Kingdom” (Nam Quốc), or “Pacified South” (An Nam) referred to the current Vietnam nowadays. Times, geographical boundaries, and the relations of both countries have changed, however. The terms “China” and “Vietnam” will also be expressed using the various names of these two countries in the past, when it is convenient. For the Chinese dynasties, I will use “Chinese Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming”

while the “Vietnamese” will be eliminated in indicating the Vietnamese dynastic houses. The “Đinh, Lê, Lý, Trần” will be used instead of the “Vietnamese Đinh, Lê, Lý, Trần.”

The problem of romanization also needs to be mentioned here. Even though literary Sinitic or classical Chinese is the lingua franca of premodern East Asia, its pronunciations differ based on each country’s vernaculars. In this study, Vietnamese names and terms will be rendered in Vietnamese and Chinese ones are in Chinese. This system is quite consistent, yet it still has inadequacies. With respect to the early history of Vietnam, names and terms will be rendered in both Chinese and Vietnamese because these figures and terms were both in circulation and the boundaries of two countries were close at that time. Although the Chinese generals such as Shixie/Sĩ Nhiếp or Zhaotuo/Triệu Đà ruled Vietnam that time, they played an essential part in building Vietnamese culture, education, socio-political institutions and so forth.

**PART I:**  
**HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

## Chapter Two:

### Vietnamese Buddhist Character – A Historical Discourse

This chapter examines the historical development and forms of Vietnamese Buddhism from its formation period to the Trần dynasty. In addition, the chapter also provides a brief discussion of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect, which has been called “the first serious effort to establish a Zen school in medieval Vietnam,”<sup>80</sup> and a “national symbol of Vietnamese independence as a response to Vietnamese *de-Sinicization* efforts.”<sup>81</sup> The aim of this historical review is to observe how Vietnamese people transformed Buddhism to become Vietnamese Buddhism or the Vietnamized process of Buddhism in Vietnam, in which I argue that syncretism is the main paradigm.

There were two trends of Vietnamese Buddhism from its formation period to the Trần dynasty and I refer to those as early Buddhism and dynastic Buddhism. The early Buddhism occurred during the time when Vietnam was under Chinese hegemonic rule and ended with the establishment of the Ngô dynasty in 939.<sup>82</sup> This Buddhism included ritual exercises, magical and devotional practices that blended with elements of Chinese, Indian, and Central Asian, as well as indigenous popular religions. Early Buddhism in

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<sup>80</sup> Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 20.

<sup>81</sup> Trieu, “Lacquered Thiền,” 139.

<sup>82</sup> Being influenced by Ngô Sĩ Liên, the author of the *Toàn Thư*, generations of Vietnamese historians believe that Ngô Quyền’s victory over the Southern Han (one of the five dynasties) was an important turning point of Vietnam’s history. Đại Việt’s independence from China took place after the collapse of the Tang Empire, during the period of five dynasties and ten kingdoms. Regarding the ending time of a thousand year of Chinese colonization, Trần Trọng Dương has suggested three historical landmarks, i.e., in 938, 931, and 905. See Trần, “Thời điểm kết thúc.” Đặng Thanh Bình has restored the theory of Ngô Thì Sĩ, the author of *Model Cases from Việt History* (越史標案 *Việt Sử Tiêu Án*), which suggested that Khúc Thừa Dụ’s mutiny in 880 should be the ending time of a thousand years of Chinese colonization. See Đặng, “Thời điểm kết thúc.”

Vietnam includes accounts of monks traveling among the masses and engaging in translating Buddhist scriptures, composing Buddhist texts, and conducting devotional practices and rituals.

Dynastic Buddhism has been identified with the independent Vietnamese dynasties since the tenth century, at which time Buddhism was recognized as the state religion. Buddhist monks started to become involved in state affairs when appointed as President of Buddhist Saṅgha (*Tăng Thống*) in the royal courts, or even participating in the changing of dynasties. Thiền was the major form of Vietnamese dynastic Buddhism. This tradition took its form from the Chinese Patriarch Chan for the sake of orthodox approval while also embracing the blending character of Vietnamese Buddhism. Dynastic Buddhism bore a tension between syncretism and the will of orthodoxy, thus exhibiting the interactions between Vietnamese Buddhism and the contemporary Buddhist world, especially with Chinese Buddhism.

As discussed in the introduction chapter, syncretism is the most salient characteristic of Vietnamese Buddhism. Whether in the early or dynastic Buddhism, this character remained constant. This was true not only with respect to the interactions between Buddhism and other existing religions but also within different Buddhist traditions in Vietnam. During the formation period, Buddhism mingled with indigenous popular religions and maintained a harmonious co-existence with Daoism and Confucianism. The Unity of Three Teachings became a religious trend through the working of a “traditional” syncretic process in which the three religions were placed in a syncretistic hierarchical order. During the dynastic period, religious syncretism aligned with nationalism when it became necessary to reinforce the unity of all Vietnamese

people in their fights for independence and freedom. The further sections will reveal how syncretism functioned within the two trends of Vietnamese Buddhism.

## I. Early Buddhism

During the first millennium of the Common Era, Vietnam was a part of the Chinese regime. At this time, the role of the developers of Buddhism in Vietnam was associated with Buddhist figures or eminent monks who were well-learned either in Buddhism or Confucian classics. They were often foreigners who engaged in travelling and translating Buddhist scriptures. While travelling throughout the region, they brought Buddhist images, texts, stories, devotional rituals, and practices with them. At that time, Buddhist monastics and lay devotees tended to live in close proximity. The laypeople started to engage in Buddhist practices such as reciting Buddhist sūtras or practicing meditation together in a temple setting. Local people also integrated Buddhism into their indigenous popular beliefs for the purpose of ensuring protection by magical aids from their Buddhist monastic contemporaries.

Those Buddhist figures and eminent monks identified forms of Buddhist teachings that they propagated to Vietnamese communities. These teachings were influenced by their own respective origins and by the Buddhist traditions that they had been trained in. In *Thiền Uyển*, Thông Biện cited the words of Tianqian (542-607) when the Chinese Emperor Sui Gaozu (r. 580-611) asked him about Buddhism in Jiaozhou and considered whether he should send Buddhist missionaries there. Tianqian mentioned the names of Mahājīvaka, Kālacaryā, Kang Senghui, Zhi Gang Liang, and Mou Bo<sup>83</sup> as the earliest Buddhist figures who brought Buddhism to Jiaozhou and contributed to the

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<sup>83</sup> For the whole conversation of Thông Biện and the Queen Dowager in English translation, see Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 128-130.

formation of Buddhism in that area. Among these early figures, only Mou Bo was Chinese while the other four Buddhist monks were of Indian and Central Asian origins.

### 1. Indian Monks in Legends

Mahājīvaka and Kālacaryā were Indian monks who arrived at Luy Lâu, the capital city of Jiaozhou, modern-day Bắc Ninh Province by the latter half of the second century CE. According to the *Recorded Sayings of the Pháp Vân Buddha at Cổ Châu* 古珠法雲佛本行語錄 (*Cổ Châu Pháp Vân Phật Bản Hạnh Ngữ Lục*, hereafter referred to as the *Cổ Châu*),<sup>84</sup> Mahājīvaka spent some time in Jiaozhou and then continued his way to China while Kālacaryā remained in Jiaozhou. Huijiao's *Biographies of Eminent Monks*<sup>85</sup> describes Mahājīvaka as an Indian traveling monk who had no permanent residence. It was said that he travelled across China and visited various coastal areas such as Funan, Jiaozhou, and Guangzhou. He was highly respected by his contemporaries for doing sacred and unpredictable deeds.<sup>86</sup>

The *Cổ Châu* determined that Kālacaryā was a student of Mahājīvaka.

Nevertheless, the other related texts such as Huijiao's *Biographies of Eminent Monks*,

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<sup>84</sup> According to Sino-Nôm Institute's Archive, the *Cổ Châu* was numbered A.818 by the EFEO. The woodblock of the text is still preserved at Dâu Buddhist Temple (present day Thuận Thành, Bắc Ninh), the earliest Buddhist temple in Vietnam. It includes both Chinese characters and Nôm translation of the text. The composer said the tale of Man Nương that *Cổ Châu* referred to was based on *Báo Cục Truyện*. According to Nguyễn Quang Hồng, the Chinese version of the *Cổ Châu* would have been composed around the end of the fourteenth century or at the latest, by the early the fifteenth century. See Nguyễn, "Bộ ba ván khắc."

<sup>85</sup> T. no. 2059, vol. 50. Huijiao 慧皎 (497-554) completed a composition of *Biographies of Eminent Monks* 高僧傳 around 530 including biographies of 257 Buddhist figures in fourteen scrolls divided into ten categories. The text introduces lives and activities of Buddhist monks from the beginning of Buddhism in China to the Liang Dynasty (502-557) for which it is also called *Liang Gaoseng zhuan* 梁高僧傳.

<sup>86</sup> T. no. 2059, vol. 50. For a discussion of Mahājīvaka in China, see Nguyen, *History of Buddhism*, 25-27.



*Tales of Extreme Reach of Karmic Retribution* (報極傳 *Báo Cực Truyện*)<sup>87</sup> and *Thiền Uyển* ignore their relationship. These texts portray them as Buddhist monks who had supernatural powers such as crossing rivers without the needs of boats, curing incurable sickness, and predicting the future. In other words, their lives were surrounded by mystical legends or unpredictable deeds. While the activities of Mahājīvaka in Jiaozhou were only vaguely described, Kālacaryā's life and miraculous abilities were tied to the legend of Man Nương<sup>88</sup> who was known as the “Mother Buddha” (*Phật mẫu*) in early Vietnamese Buddhism.

As the legend goes, Man Nương followed Kālacaryā to learn and practice Buddhism. One day, Kālacaryā stepped across Man Nương's body by accident, which caused Man Nương to become pregnant. As the time came, Man Nương gave birth to a baby girl and brought her to Kālacaryā. The monk took the baby, carried the baby to the crossroads by the riverhead, then used his staff to strike a banyan tree by which the tree was opened, allowing Kālacaryā to place the baby girl in the tree trunk. The monk then gave his staff to Man Nương and told her that she should plant it in the ground when the drought occurred so that the water would come out and famers would be saved. Upon saying this, Kālacaryā disappeared.

Years later, Man Nương helped people to overcome drought as the monk had instructed. One day, the tree in which Kālacaryā had left the baby girl years earlier fell. It

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<sup>87</sup> *Tales of Extreme Reach of Karmic Retribution* (報極傳 *Báo Cực Truyện*) dated circa eleventh century. This was a collection of Buddhist miracle tales, possibly composed by Buddhist monk(s) in Vietnam. Although it is no longer in extant, we can acknowledge the existence of the text via the *Cổ Châu* and the *Collected Record of Departed Spirits from the Việt Realms* (越甸幽靈集 *Việt Điện U Linh Tập*), a Buddhist text of the fourteenth century.

<sup>88</sup> There are two versions of Man Nương's story as recorded in the *Cổ Châu* and *Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*. For an English translation of the story, see Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 333-334.

drifted along the river, then stopped and lingered in front of the temple. People tried to chop it up for firewood, but their effort was in vain. It would break any ax and even three hundred men could not pull the tree trunk out of the river. Man Nương happened to be at the site, washing her hands. She touched the tree trunk and it moved. It was then used to carve four Buddha statues called Dharma Cloud (*Pháp Vân*), Dharma Rain (*Pháp Vũ*), Dharma Thunder (*Pháp Lôi*), and Dharma Lightning (*Pháp Điện*). These are the forms of the goddesses of the four elements of nature relating to rain, which is essential in any agricultural society. However, they were called “Buddhas” by local people in the tales. This is possibly because they were being worshipped at Buddhist temples. Man Nương, as the mother of the baby girl who was left in the tree trunk, became the “Mother Buddha” in such a legendary context.

It is difficult to correlate tales and legends with historical facts, yet they reflect historical realities at some level. The encounter of Kālacaryā and Man Nương or the mythical pregnancy of the Vietnamese female figure in the story is a metaphor of the intertwinement of Buddhism and Vietnamese folk religion during the early centuries of the Common Era. In this case, Kālacaryā and Man Nương should be treated as representatives of both Buddhism and the local people. The supernatural powers of Kālacaryā reflected the ancient Vietnamese people’s wishes for protection or supernatural aids. In the story, his staff was said to help people overcome a severe drought and the four Buddhas also related to the rain and the rain-making ritual, which were essential to peasants who were the main labor force of Jiaozhou society.

Despite their differences in social position or status, the story uplifted both the Buddhist monk who would predict the drought and help local people to solve it, and Man

Nương, a local female figure who achieved the honorable title as the “Mother Buddha.” Furthermore, the four so-called “Buddhas” Dharma Cloud, Dharma Rain, Dharma Thunder, and Dharma Lightning became fruits of a symbolic marriage between Buddhism and the indigenous folk religion. The tale persisted through oral transmission and became rooted in the mass culture, which led Buddhism to gradually become a part of the local belief system. All the while, local gods and goddesses also entered the Buddhist pantheon, adding unique signatures onto particular Buddhist cultures. In the tale of Man Nương, these female figures became identified with Buddhas with respect to religious qualities as well as the enlightened character of Buddhism.

In addition, some other aspects of the tale of Man Nương show the mixture of early Buddhism and the Tứ Pháp folk religion. One example is that the birthday of Man Nương’s daughter fell on the eighth day of the fourth month, which was the same as the Shakyamuni Buddha’s birthday. The Dâu Buddhist Temple has held an annual celebration of the Buddha Bathing Ceremony together with a public procession of the four goddess statues leading to different Buddhist temples in the area. The Vietnamese folklorists believe the procession of the four statues was a part of a rain-making ritual in ancient and medieval Vietnam.<sup>89</sup> Thus, the ambiguous merging of a natural goddess with a Buddha figure, as well as the fusion of their birthdays and related ceremonies, are examples of practical ways that Buddhism peacefully accommodated itself and evolved.

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<sup>89</sup> The official historical record of Đại Việt, the *Toàn Thư*, mentioned the four statues of Tứ Pháp folk religion in association with rain rituals either to pray for rain or rain-ceasing as conducted by the royal courts. In the Lý dynasty, the rituals were conducted at least three times under the reigns of Lý Nhân Tông in 1073, Lý Thần Tông in 1137, and Lý Cao Tông in 1188. Such rituals also took place again in the royal court of Lê Nhân Tông in 1448. See *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 1, 293; 327; 351. *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 387.

These dynamic interactions between Buddhism and Tứ Pháp folk religion helped Buddhism to root its influences among the Vietnamese local people.

## 2. Mou Bo and Chinese Immigrants

Although Jiaozhou was under Chinese domination, its interaction with the outside world seemed free and easy. It was not only Buddhist monks from India and Central Asia, like Mahājīvaka and Kālacaryā who visited Jiaozhou, but also Chinese officials like Mou Bo (born circa 167) who settled there when China was in political chaos. In the *Removing Doubts*, Mou Bo said many Northerners (Chinese) moved to Jiaozhou due to the political turmoil after Emperor Ling of Han 漢靈帝 (r. 168-189) passed away in 189. According to Lê Mạnh Thát, the wave of Chinese immigrants to Jiaozhou possibly took place years before the decline of Emperor Wen's reign.<sup>90</sup> The then governor of Jiaozhou, Shixie advocated religious diversity while he himself honored different religions.<sup>91</sup> The Chinese immigrants included those who dared to challenge traditional values of the old religions or propagate new ideas, like Mouzi, and those who sought for a peaceful and harmonious religious co-existence or even a hermit life.

This tendency also remained during later centuries. For example, Huilin 慧琳 (fl. 421-445), author of *Discussion Between Black and White* (白黑論 *Bạch Hắc Luận*), also came to Jiaozhou after a controversy with the Chinese Buddhist Saṅgha. Huilin was a

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<sup>90</sup> Lê, *Mâu Tử*, 78-82.

<sup>91</sup> Shixie 士變/ Sĩ Nhiếp was a governor (*Tiết độ sứ*) of Jiaozhou from 187 to 226 who was spreading both Confucian and Daoist teachings while residing there. He was praised by later historians as the *Confucian Patriarch of Nam Giao* (*Nam Giao học tổ*) for his efforts to propagate Confucianism and introduce Chinese script and culture to Vietnamese people. Shixie was also associated with the contemporary Daoist adepts in Jiaozhou. His death and resurrection were written by Ge Hong 葛洪 (283-343) in his *Biographies of the Immortals* (*Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 *Thần tiên truyện*). Ge Hong believed Shixie was saved by immortal Dong Feng 董奉 (ca. 200/220-280) with the help of the elixir. Regardless of the real power of the elixir, the story was circulated among the Vietnamese community.

Chinese Buddhist monk and was once a high-ranking official under the reign of Emperor Wen of Liu Song 宋文帝 (407-453). In the *Discussion Between Black and White*, Huilin criticized the redundant waste of building Buddhist temples, casting statues, and organizing rituals. He also raised doubts about karmic retribution, supernatural powers of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and the eternal life of Amitābha Buddha. Huilin was expelled by the Chinese Buddhist Saṅgha after his composition of the *Discussion Between Black and White*, leading to his resettling in Jiaozhou in 456 after the death of Emperor Wen of Liu Song.

From the time of Mou Bo (the second century) to Huilin (the fifth century), Jiaozhou was a destination for many Chinese religious refugees who were looking for a diverse environment where they could express their unorthodox or innovative religious views. Since Jiaozhou was also not far away from their homeland, the back-and-forth travels were not so difficult for them.<sup>92</sup> And by accepting differences, Vietnamese Buddhism developed via integration into Chinese religions while at the same time enriching its own religious culture.

Aside from Mouzi's composition of the *Removing Doubts*, the prosperity of early Vietnamese Buddhism is based on the translations of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese

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<sup>92</sup> The traveling route between ancient Vietnam and China was much easier since early Vietnam was considered as a part of the Chinese empire. When the Chinese immigrated to Vietnam, some scattered sources from early Vietnamese monks also entered Chinese Buddhist literature, including the *Record of the Three Jewels throughout Successive Dynasties* (*Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀) and the *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳). The former one records biography of Zhi Gang Liang Zhe (Kalaruci), a monk from Central Asia, who traveled to Jiaozhou and translated the *Sadharma-samādhi-sūtra* (*Kinh Pháp Hoa Tam Muội*) in six fascicles in 265 with the help of a Vietnamese monk named Đạo Hinh. For a detailed discussion of Zhi Gang Liang Zhe, see Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 71, and chap. 2, n. 258.

The *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* includes a biography of another Vietnamese monk, Huệ Thắng 慧勝, who shared Jiaozhou's origin, engaged in travelling, and studied meditation with an Indian monk named Dharmadeva. He was said to have been absorbed in a *samādhi* state for one complete day. Huệ Thắng also chanted the *Lotus Sūtra* daily. See T. no. 2060, vol. 50, p.550c8-16.

and possibly into Vietnamese language.<sup>93</sup> Many translations have been lost due to the long period of Chinese domination, yet some of them remain extant such as Kang Senghui's translations of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, the *Jiu za pi yu jing* (舊雜譬喻經 *Cựu Tạp Thí Dụ Kinh*) and composed *Scripture on the Collection of the Six Perfections* (六度集經 *Lục Độ Tập Kinh*), and his commentaries on An Shigao's translation of the *Ānāpānasamṛti Sūtra* (安般守意經 *An Ban Thủ Ý Kinh*)<sup>94</sup> and An Xuan and Yan Fotiao's *Fajing Jing* (法鏡經 *Pháp Kính Kinh*).<sup>95</sup> In addition, there are Kalaruci's translation of *Sadharmasamādhī Sūtra* (法華三昧 *Pháp Hoa Tam Muội*) and Vinītaruci's translation of *Mahāyānaipulvadhāraṇī Sūtra* (大乘方廣總持經 *Đại Thừa Phương Quảng Tổng Trì Kinh*).

### 3. The Figure of Kang Senghui

Kang Senghui (康僧會 Khương Tăng Hội) (?- 280),<sup>96</sup> the son of a Sogdian merchant and a Vietnamese woman, was an eminent monk and translator who was born in Jiaozhou.<sup>97</sup> He was well-versed in Sanskrit, Chinese and Vietnamese languages, at the very least. In the Preface to the *Ānāpānasati Sūtra*, it is said that Kang Senghui was ten when his parents passed away. He then joined monastic life at a Buddhist temple in

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<sup>93</sup> Lê Mạnh Thát, in most of his scholarly works in history of Buddhism in Vietnam, argues that there possibly were Buddhist scriptures and texts that were translated into Vietnamese language. However, this requires textual evidence such as physical versions of the texts or archaeological evidence. In the *Removing Doubts*, Mou Bo referred to a thirty-seven-chapter Buddhist text called *Essential of Buddhist Scriptures* (佛經之要 *Phật Kinh Chi Yếu*).

<sup>94</sup> Nguyễn, *Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, 59.

<sup>95</sup> Nattier, *Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations*, 150.

<sup>96</sup> For biography of Kang Senghui, see T. no 2059, vol. 50, p.325a13-p.326b13. With regard to a detailed discussion of the life and activities of Kang Senghui, see Zurcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 51-55.

<sup>97</sup> Thích, *Master Tang Hoi*, 12.

Jiaozhou.<sup>98</sup> After a proper training, Kang Senghui started to translate Buddhist scriptures and compose Buddhist texts in Jiaozhou before he set off on his missionary journey to China in 247.

The reason he decided to travel to China was because he had heard that Buddhism had not existed in Jiangdong 江東 yet. After arriving in Jianye 見業 (modern day Nanjing 南京) in 250, Kang Senghui gradually became a leading Buddhist figure in China. He stayed and propagated the Buddha-Dharma in China until his death in 280.<sup>99</sup> As a result of his having been ordained in Jiaozhou and engaging in translating and composing Buddhist texts, as well as being involved in efforts to propagate Buddhism in both Vietnam and China, the figure of Kang Senghui became an important source to understand the development of Buddhism in early Vietnam as well as its communication with the contemporary Buddhist world.

According to historical evidence, Kang Senghui ordained and got his Buddhist training in Jiaozhou. This means that Luy Lô Center of Jiaozhou had a well-developed system of Buddhist monasticism and education in the third century. As for Kang Senghui's practice, Lê Mạnh Thát suggests that he promoted the breathing (*ānāpāna*) meditation method of An Shigao since Kang Senghui wrote a commentary on An Shigao's translation of *Ānāpānasati Sūtra*.<sup>100</sup> Erik Zürcher and Jan Nattier discuss roles of Kang Senghui as a medium between Theravāda and Mahāyāna ideals and practices

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<sup>98</sup> T. no. 603, vol. 15.

<sup>99</sup> After the fall of the Han dynasty in 229, Jiaozhou was a part of Eastern Wu Kingdom 東吳 (220-280) in Jiangdong. The ruler of this region at the time of Kang Senghui was Sun Quan 孫權 (182-252). The capital city of Eastern Wu was Jianye 見業. After having challenged Kang Senghui several times, Sun Quan supported the building of the First Temple 建初寺 (Chùa Kiến Sơ) in Jiangdong.

<sup>100</sup> Lê, *Văn Học Phật Giáo*, 279.

through his translation of *Liu du zi jing* and commentary on *Fajing jing*, scriptures of Mahāyāna Buddhism.<sup>101</sup> When Kang Senghui appeared in *Thiền Uyển*, he became an ancestral master of a doctrinal school of Buddhism in Vietnam by the justification of Thông Biện. However, Thông Biện's assertion was more romanticism than the truth itself.

Historically, there has been no actual evidence of the existence of a scriptural or doctrinal Buddhist school in Vietnam. Neither Mou Bo nor Kang Senghui had the intention to establish a specific Buddhist school or genealogy throughout their lifetimes.<sup>102</sup> The activities of translating and composing Buddhist texts were a common endeavor at the introductory stage of Buddhism in any new land. This happened throughout the history of Chinese Buddhism as well. Therefore, their literary contributions are not distinctive enough to claim them as ancestral masters of any Buddhist school or tradition. Although Thông Biện's claim requires further examination, his conversation with Empress Dowager Phù Thánh Linh Nhân (Ỗ Lan) in the spring of 1036 remains a main source for later interpretation of Buddhist schools or forms of Vietnamese Buddhism in both early and dynastic periods.

According to Thông Biện, both the scriptural and Thiền schools of Buddhism had been transmitted to Vietnamese Buddhism. Thông Biện's statement the first effort to claim an existence of a scriptural tradition in Vietnamese Buddhism. The scriptural or

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<sup>101</sup> Nattier, *Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations*, 150.

<sup>102</sup> The *Removing Doubts* of Mou Bo offered a rudimentary understanding of Buddhism that was not associated with any school of thought or based on a specific Buddhist scripture. As for the case of Kang Senghui, his works were similar with his contemporaries, which were to translate and comment on translations of Buddhist scriptures which had nothing to do with offering a new viewpoint, a new trend of practice, or an intention to build up a new system of Buddhist association based on some specific Buddhist sūtra. See Nguyen, *Essays into Vietnamese Pasts*, 88.



doctrinal school of Buddhism became identified with the Tiantai school of Chinese Buddhism.<sup>103</sup> Thông Biện intended to justify the existence of a scriptural school in Vietnam by saying it, “began with Mou Bo and Kang Senghui.”<sup>104</sup> He also claimed that the Thiền school started by Huineng of Caoxi was later transmitted to Vietnam by Vinītaruci and Vô Ngôn Thông, under whose names the Thiền schools under their names were established.<sup>105</sup> Although Thông Biện was a savant Buddhist monk, his justification of Vietnamese forms of Buddhism was biased. The Chinese Tiantai tradition started by Huisi 慧思 (515-576) and Zhiyi 智顗 (538-597) which appeared much later than the time of Mou Bo and Kang Senghui so that it was impossible to put them together.

There was no clear separation between a doctrinal and Thiền school in Vietnam. To take Vinītaruci as an example: regardless of his being considered the founder of the Vinītaruci Thiền sect in Vietnam, he also engaged in translating Buddhist scriptures, but some of these were of the Tantric school.<sup>106</sup> Or in the case of Thông Biện: he was the eighth generation of the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect yet devoted himself to the *Lotus Sūtra*. In both cases, the division of a doctrinal school from a Thiền school in Vietnamese Buddhism was impossible.

So, what was the intention of Thông Biện’s justification? The probable answer was his effort to put Vietnamese Buddhism on a parallel with the Chinese counterpart for the sake of religious orthodoxy. The separation between the scriptural and meditative

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<sup>103</sup> Trần, “Le Buddhisme En Annam,” 227-229.

<sup>104</sup> Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 129.

<sup>105</sup> See note 104 above.

<sup>106</sup> The translation of *Mahāyānavaipulyadhāraṇī Sūtra* was done by Vinītaruci and was one of the early scriptures of Tantric Buddhism.

(dhyāna) schools of Chinese Buddhism began when Shenhui 神會 (684-758) promoted the sudden enlightenment teaching of Huineng 慧能 (?-713). This understanding was introduced into Vietnam when followers of the Southern Chan school propagated its teaching there. *Thiền Uyển* records that Vinītaruci was a successor of the third Chinese Chan Patriarch Sengcan 僧璨 (529-613) and Vô Ngôn Thông, the founder of Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền Sect in Vietnam was a successor of Baizhang 百丈 (720-814). These elements effected Thông Biện's justification of the scriptural and Thiền school in Vietnamese Buddhism to a larger extent. The coerced link between Mou Bo and Kang Senghui with the scriptural school of Tiantai offered by Thông Biện merely served as a symmetry with the Thiền school in Vietnamese Buddhism.

To define their religious identity, many Vietnamese Buddhists and scholars fall into the trap of Thông Biện's interpretation of forms of Vietnamese Buddhism. Around the figure of Kang Senghui, there are two notable viewpoints that complicate his place and narrative within discourse of Vietnamese Buddhist traditions. Firstly, in line with Thông Biện in *Thiền Uyển*, Vietnamese scholars such as Trần Văn Giáp and his followers claimed Kang Senghui as an ancestral master of the scriptural school in early Vietnamese Buddhism, while Keith W. Taylor offers an interesting perspective on the Tiantai in Vietnam. Secondly, Kang Senghui is positioned the founder of the earliest Thiền school of Vietnamese Buddhism, according to the viewpoints of Thích Nhất Hạnh, Lê Mạnh Thát, Nguyễn Tài Thư and his colleagues. The Thiền school of Kang Senghui was treated as the “seed” of the Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect of the Trần dynasty.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Trieu, *Lacquered Thien*, 7.

Both hypotheses are still within the spectrum of a syncretic Vietnamese Buddhism. In the work, *The Birth of Vietnam*, Keith W. Taylor writes: “Eclectic in intent and syncretic in methods, the doctrines of T’ien T’ai sect spread quickly into Vietnam.”<sup>108</sup> In this statement, the author implies a composite nature of Vietnamese Buddhism when it easily absorbed the “eclectic in intent and syncretic in methods” of the Tiantai teachings. That would be one of the reasons why the *Lotus Sūtra*, the prominent scripture of the Tiantai tradition, was widely circulated among Vietnamese Buddhists through centuries.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, Keith W. Taylor explains that the reason the Tiantai school spread so quickly in Vietnam was because it had never been influential among the Vietnamese ruling classes like the Thiền school. In other words, elements or teachings of the Tiantai tradition had spread, yet its institution or transmissive lineage never existed in early Vietnamese Buddhism. If there was no such a scriptural school of Buddhism in early Vietnam, it would be impossible to consider Kang Senghui as its ancestral master.

The hypothesis that Kang Senghui was the founder of the first Thiền sect in Vietnam serves the purpose of explaining the origin of the Thiền tradition in Vietnam. His commentary of the *Āṇāpānasati Sūtra* is the crux of the interpretation that Kang Senghui started a Thiền school in early Vietnamese Buddhism. The *Āṇāpānasati Sūtra*

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<sup>108</sup> Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam*, 156.

<sup>109</sup> The *Lotus Sūtra* appeared as early as the third century in the history of Vietnamese Buddhism. Its first Chinese translation from Sanskrit was done in Vietnam by Kalaruci and a Vietnamese monk named Thích Đạo Thanh or Đạo Hình. *Thiền Uyển* records many Vietnamese Buddhist monks used the sūtra as their daily cultivation such as Minh Tâm (?-1034), Bảo Tính (?-1034), Thông Biện (?-1134), Minh Trí (?-1196) and so forth. Later, Vietnamese Buddhists also composed commentaries of the *Lotus Sūtra* in both Chinese and Vietnamese language such as *Pháp Hoa Khoa Chú* of Pháp Loa (1280-1340), or those of Minh Châu Hương Hải (1628-1715), and Pháp Liên (c. 1800-1860). The sūtra has been popular among Vietnamese Buddhist communities, whether in Vietnam, and continues to be so to this day. Such continuity and popularity of the scripture play some role in convincing scholars like Trần Văn Giáp, Keith W. Taylor and other Vietnamese scholars to consider relevant the existence of the Tiantai tradition in Vietnamese Buddhism.

was translated into Chinese language by An Shigao 安世高 (?-168). This sūtra focuses on mindful breathing, a meditative exercise of the breath which belongs to Theravāda Buddhism. Nevertheless, Kang Senghui's approach to the sūtra was beyond school and tradition. In the Preface to the *Ānāpānasati Sūtra*, it reads: "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 suffering."<sup>110</sup> This statement echoes with the Bodhisattva's ideal in Kang Senghui's translation of *Scripture on the Collection of the Six Perfections*.

To use "mindfulness of breathing" as a skillful means to save sentient beings from the ocean of suffering, i.e., *samsāra* is an element of "engaged Buddhism" that has been promoted by Thích Nhất Hạnh of Plum Village. According to Don Thuong Trieu, this engagement view of Kang Senghui responded to the "suffering and injustice" of Vietnamese society when it was under the Chinese domination.<sup>111</sup> To Vietnamese nationalists, such an interpretation makes complete sense. Nevertheless, if Kang Senghui held that view, why would he set forth on his trip to China and spend the rest of his life propagating Buddhism there? There was no evidence whatsoever of Kang Senghui's activities that related to saving Vietnamese people from suffering and injustice. As a Buddhist monk who observed the Bodhisattva's ideal, Kang Senghui would likely rather save all sentient beings equally. Yet the views of Thích Nhất Hạnh and Don Thuong Trieu have spread widely, claiming that Kang Senghui formed a Thiền school in the history of Vietnamese Buddhism.

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<sup>110</sup> Thich, *Master Tang Hoi*, 87.

<sup>111</sup> Trieu, *Lacquered Thien*, 8.

This study treats Kang Senghui as an admirer of the Northern school of An Shigao with its emphasis on the early meditation practice. Although he had no intention to start a scriptural or Thiền school, to build a systematic organization, or recruit his followers in Vietnam, his translation career and personal cultivation played an important role in the development of early Buddhism in Vietnam. By observing both Theravāda and Mahāyāna practices, Kang Senghui showed an open tendency towards different schools of Buddhism. His method of “mindfulness of breathing” has remained an important practice among Vietnamese Buddhists up to the present day. This enlarges the scope of Thiền Buddhism which is traditionally understood as the parallel of Chinese Patriarch Chan. By such an understanding, Thiền in Vietnamese Buddhism is beyond school or sectarianism.

Centuries after Kang Senghui, the *Thiền Uyển* records biographies of eminent monks of the three Thiền sects, named the Vinītaruci, the Vô Ngôn Thông and the Thảo Đường. These figures portray the Sinic influences of the Chinese Patriarch Chan tradition into Vietnamese Thiền Buddhism. Historically, the Vinītaruci and the Vô Ngôn Thông were established when Vietnam was still under the Chinese domination while the Thảo Đường began to flourish during the Lý dynasty of Đại Việt. Due to interactions with Chinese Buddhism during the medieval period, Vietnamese Buddhists formed the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect and accepted the introduction of the Caodong 曹洞 (Tào Động) and Linji 臨濟 (Lâm Tế) Thiền sects into their religious system. In the next discussion, I will examine the formations of the Vinītaruci and the Vô Ngôn Thông sects so that we could see how these traditions merged into the composite nature of the Vietnamese religious milieu.

With such a composite context, I approach these Thiền sects in a loose sense which refer to pedagogical and practical traditions flowing from eminent figures who contributed to enriching Vietnamese Buddhist thought instead of hierarchical lineages of monks belonging to different monastic institutions or adhering to specific doctrinal outlooks. Although it sounds contradictory to the intention of *Thiền Uyển*, a text of “transmission of the lamp” genre, this loose approach solves the overlap between these Thiền sects and explains the syncretic tendency within the Vietnamese Thiền Buddhism.

#### 4. Vinītaruci Thiền Sect

Vinītaruci (?-594) was an Indian monk. He was said to receive the “mind-seal” from the third Chan Patriarch Sengcan and following that, wished to serve by his master’s side. However, Sengcan requested instead that he go south and transmit the Chan tradition. Traveling south to Guangzhou, Vinītaruci spent six years at Zhizhi Temple, translated the *Gayāśirṣa Sūtra*, the *Differentiation of Karmic Rewards*, and the *Mahāyānavaipulyadhāraṇī Sūtra*. In 580, he moved to Jiaozhou and settled down at Pháp Vân Temple. He encountered and transmitted the mind-seal to Pháp Hiền. Thus, he started the Vinītaruci Thiền sect in Vietnam. *Thiền Uyển* also mentioned that he re-translated the *Dhāraṇī Sūtra* in one volume while he was in Pháp Vân Temple.

The Chinese sources provide a different account of Vinītaruci in comparison with that of *Thiền Uyển*. Except for his name and the titles of two Buddhist scriptures that were translated by him (the *Gayāśirṣa Sūtra* and the *Mahāyānavaipulyadhāraṇī Sūtra*), other pieces of information in the Chinese sources do not align.<sup>112</sup> An examination of key teachings of these two scriptures would clarify Vinītaruci’s thoughts and practices.

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<sup>112</sup> Cuong Tu Nguyen wrote a detailed account of Vinītaruci based on both *Thiền Uyển* and the Chinese sources such as the *Lidai sanbao ji*, the *Daitang neidan lu*, the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, the *Kaiyuan*

The *Gayāśirṣa Sūtra* belongs to the *prajñā* genre, which emphasizes “bodhi” as the nature of the Buddha’s awakening.<sup>113</sup> Before the translation of Vinītaruci, the sūtra had been translated into Chinese language by Kūmarajīva and was titled the *Wenshushili wen puti jing* 文殊師利問菩提經 (T. 464) and also by Bodhiruci, whose translation titled *Jiaye shanding jing* 伽耶山頂經 (T. 465). In the sūtra, *bodhi* is explained as that beyond words and letters which is non-duality, or not trapped between perceptions of true or false, form or formless, birth and death, etc.<sup>114</sup> The *prajñā* element is essential in the Chinese Chan Patriarch tradition. The sūtra also promotes the Bodhisattva’s ideal<sup>115</sup> through the practices of the six perfections (*pāramitā*), a character of most Mahāyāna scriptures.

The *Mahāyānavaipulyadhāraṇī Sūtra* or the *Dhāraṇī Sūtra* (as referred in *Thiền Uyển*) is an early Mahāyāna scripture. Dharmarakṣa had translated the sūtra into Chinese language in the third century; it is titled *Foshuo ji zhu fangdeng xue jing* 佛說濟諸方等學經 (T. 274). The sūtra includes elements of Tantric Buddhism,<sup>116</sup> repentance

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*shijiao lu*, and the *Zhenyuan xinding shijiao mulu*. In this discussion, the author believes that the account of Vinītaruci in *Thiền Uyển* as apocryphal is allegedly attributed to Thông Biện. See Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 38-40. Lê Mạnh Thát also provided a thorough investigation of both sources and drew the conclusion that the Chinese sources regarding to the account of Vinītaruci are unreliable. See Lê, *Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, Vol. 2, 42. From representatives like Nguyen and Lê, we can observe the two contradictory tendencies towards the interpretations of the accounts of Vinītaruci and the Thiền sect that bears his name. While Nguyen refuted the existence of this Thiền sect as well as his encounter with the Chinese third Chan Patriarch Sengcan, Lê tried to prove the legitimacy of the *Thiền Uyển* as well as the orthodoxy of Thiền Buddhism in Vietnam.

<sup>113</sup> Nguyễn, *Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, 94.

<sup>114</sup> Lê, *Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, Vol. 2, 58-59.

<sup>115</sup> T. no. 466, vol. 14, p.487b22.

<sup>116</sup> Thích Nhất Hạnh stated that Vinītaruci was the first Buddhist monk who introduced Tantric Buddhism into Vietnam. See Thích, “Truyền Thống Sinh Động.”

performance,<sup>117</sup> the Amitābha belief of Pure Land Buddhism, and the Bodhisattva's idea of practicing the six perfections (*pāramitā*) in which practitioners are directed to focus on the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) because it is the most wonderful perfection.<sup>118</sup> These contents reflect the composite character of Vinītaruci Thiền sect.

To confirm the Vinītaruci Thiền sect as a legitimate sect as any Chinese Chan Patriarch school, Vietnamese Buddhists undertook an interpretation of Tantric elements and their connection to the concept of transmission of the mind-seal in Chinese Chan Buddhism. For example, Nguyễn Lang explained how the concept of transmission of mind-seal in Chinese Chan Buddhism generated from the idea of mind-seal expressed in the *Vairocana Sūtra*, the main scripture of Tantric Buddhism.<sup>119</sup> In the *Vairocana Sūtra*, there is a paragraph talking about the kernel or essential teaching of the Buddha in any Buddhist scripture. Those who grasp the essential teaching (or the mind-seal) of the Buddha would grasp the meanings of all Buddhist scriptures of the three vehicles (Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna).<sup>120</sup> The author of *Thiền Uyển* also includes the view of *dhāraṇī* in the Thiền tradition. The account of Thông Thiền (?-1228) records that “A monk asked: ‘What is Buddha?’ Thông Thiền said: ‘The original mind is Buddha; therefore, Xuanzang, the Tripiṭaka Master of the Tang dynasty, said, ‘Just realize the mind-ground. This is called *dhāraṇī*.’”

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<sup>117</sup> The sūtra suggests repentance practice in the six divisions of the day, which becomes an inspiration of Trần Thái Tông's *Procedure*. This feature is discussed in Chapter Six of the dissertation.

<sup>118</sup> T. no. 275, vol. 9, p.381a27-b6.

<sup>119</sup> Nguyễn, *Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, 96.

<sup>120</sup> See note 119 above.



The purpose of this approach is to neutralize the image of Vinītaruci as the founder of a legitimate Chan/Thiền sect, in particular, his association with magical powers and Tantric practices. The author of *Thiền Uyển* shared a similar intention when listing a recitation of *dhāraṇī* or *dhāraṇī-samādhi* as the major practice of Vinītaruci's successors such as Ma Ha (n.d), who devoted himself to the practice of repentance and reciting the *Mahākaruṇa Dhāraṇī* for three years; Đạo Hạnh (? - 1117), who recited the *Mahākaruṇa Dhāraṇī* 10,8000 times per day; or Vạn Hạnh (?-1025), who upheld the *Vaipulyasamādhi* (*Dhāraṇī-samādhi*).

In addition to the practices of chanting the *dhāraṇī*, many Buddhist monks of the Vinītaruci Thiền sect were also associated with performing magical powers. In other words, reciting mantras or *dhāraṇī* would be considered as a method for achieving magical powers. For instance, there are the accounts of Ma Ha, who blessed water with mantras and spat the water on those who had leprosy, thus curing them; of Minh Không (1065-1141), who used his magical power to cure the strange disease of King Lý Thần Tông (r. 1127-1138); of Đại Xá (1120-1180), who often recited the *Samantabhadra* mantra as daily practice, helping to resist severe torture and fear; and Nguyễn Học (?-1181), who recited the *Dhāraṇī of the Fragrant Ocean of Great Compassion* for curing sickness and praying for rain.

The Tantric elements of the Vinītaruci Thiền sect and the magical powers that Buddhist monks used to cure strange and severe sickness or pray for the rains were compatible with Vietnamese folk religions. This feature had been present in the Early Vietnamese Buddhism and seemed not to have disappeared even once Vietnamese

Buddhists began to accept more Chinese elements into their religious views. Thus, Tantric elements and magical powers mingled into the Vietnamese Thiền tradition.

Another important feature that aligned the Vinītaruci Thiền sect with the Chinese Chan school was a lineage through the transmission of mind-seal between masters and disciples. *Thiền Uyển* records Vinītaruci having received the mind-seal from Sengcan and transmitting it to the monk he met at Pháp Vân Temple, Pháp Hiền (?-626). There were twenty-eight biographies of eminent monks in the lineage of the Vinītaruci Thiền sect. However, either the lineage itself or the concept of transmission of “mind-seal” were fabrications<sup>121</sup> of *Thiền Uyển*’s author, who was eager to claim the authority and orthodoxy of the Thiền sect as a parallel to the Chinese Chan Patriarch tradition.

The *prajñā* element of the the *Gayāśirṣa Sūtra*, the Tantric elements and other blended features of the *Mahāyānavaipulyadhāraṇī Sūtra*, as well as the involvement of Buddhist adepts allegedly belonging to the Vinītaruci Thiền sects make this Thiền tradition more in line with the syncretistic nature of Vietnamese Buddhism in general than the Chinese Chan Patriarch tradition specifically. This would explain why some biographies of eminent monks as recorded in *Thiền Uyển* overlapped between different Thiền sects. Even though they were considered as Thiền masters, their practices were beyond schools and traditions. While the accounts of the Vinītaruci Thiền sect aligned to Tantric practices like reciting *dhāraṇī*, performing auspicious deeds, many monks of the

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<sup>121</sup> Chinese Chan Buddhism is a Chinese product, as the term mind-seal had originated from the Chinese idea of the red seal that Chinese emperors identified with authority and legitimacy. The concept of mind-seal in Chinese Chan Patriarch tradition appeared for the first time in the biography and *Recorded Saying of Mazu*, which was several centuries after Vinītaruci’s time. In addition, recent scholarship on Chan Buddhism has also proven that the figure of Sengcan as the Third Patriarch of Chinese Chan was a fictitious invention of Chinese Buddhism. Therefore, even though Vinītaruci had encountered Sengcan and learned the meditation practice from him, there was not necessarily of a moment of transmission of mind-seal between the two. See Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 40.

Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect were devoted to the practices of both Chinese Chan and Pure Land school.

## 5. Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền Sect

According to *Thiền Uyển*, Vô Ngôn Thông 無言通 (?-826),<sup>122</sup> who was originally from Guangzhou, learned Dharma from Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709-788). He then received the mind-seal from Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (720-814), who was a well-known Chan master of Huineng lineage.<sup>123</sup> In 820, Vô Ngôn Thông was said to have crossed the Chinese border, moved to Jiaozhou, and resided at Kiến Sơ Temple at Phù Đổng District, Tiên Du Prefecture (modern day Hanoi). Vô Ngôn Thông was said to have established the second Thiền sect under his name in Vietnam after passing the mind-seal to Lập Đức Cảm Thành, a resident monk of Kiến Sơ Temple.<sup>124</sup> Vô Ngôn Thông's lineage lasted for fifteen generations.<sup>125</sup>

The account of Vô Ngôn Thông in Vietnamese sources, including the *Collated Biographies* (照對錄 *Chiếu Đối Lục*),<sup>126</sup> *Thiền Uyển*, and *Summarized Diagram of*

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<sup>122</sup> The English translation of the biography of Vô Ngôn Thông in Nguyen, 105-107.

<sup>123</sup> *Thiền Uyển* notes that Vô Ngôn Thông is identical with Bu Yu Tong 不語通, one of successors of Baizhang, in *Transmission of the Lamp in Jingde Era* (景德傳燈錄 *Jingde chuandenglu*). T. no. 2076, vol. 51, p.268a28-b13.

<sup>124</sup> Lập Đức Cảm Thành (?-860) was the first abbot of Kiến Sơ Temple, the name of which was the same as that of the temple established by Kang Senghui in Jianye in the third century. This would imply a long-term influence of Kang Senghui in the Vietnamese community. Lê, *Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, Vol. 2, 348-351.

<sup>125</sup> *Thiền Uyển* records only fifteen generations with biographies of thirty-seven eminent monks. However, Nguyễn Lang and Lê Mạnh Thát believed that this Thiền sect included seventeen generations based on records of both *Thiền Uyển* and *Lược Dẫn Thiền Phái Đồ*. See Nguyễn, *Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, 125-126; Lê, *Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, Vol. 2, 153-155.

<sup>126</sup> This text no longer extant was attributed to Thông Biện, a figure of Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect, who appeared in the conversation with Empress Dowager Phù Thánh Linh Nhân Ý Lan to discuss Buddhism and its development in Vietnam.

*Transmission of Thiền Tradition* (略引禪派圖 *Lược Dẫn Thiền Phái Đồ*),<sup>127</sup> is an attempt to prove the orthodoxy of this Thiền sect by linking it with the Chinese Southern Chan of Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch. The first effort was to portray Vô Ngôn Thông as similar to Bodhidharma. The history of Chinese Southern Chan Buddhism as recorded in *Transmission of the Lamp* describes Bodhidharma as having traveled to China, although the Chinese people seemed not to understand his teachings at the beginning. Therefore, he went to the Shaolin Temple 少林寺 and sat “facing the wall” for nine years until he encountered Huike 慧可 (487-593), transmitted the mind-seal to the latter one, and started the Chan school in China. This happened to Vô Ngôn Thông in the same way when he set his foot in Vietnam. The *Thiền Uyển* records: “... Except for his two simple meals, Thông was absorbed in the joy of meditation. He generally sat facing the wall without uttering a single word.”<sup>128</sup> This “wall contemplation” was not seen in other Chinese Chan patriarchs after Bodhidharma or in biographies of Cảm Thành and other Dharma-heirs of the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect. Both Bodhidharma and Vô Ngôn Thông were foreigners who allegedly brought the Chan/Thiền method to the new lands. Hence, the similarity of “wall facing” or “wall contemplation” in their accounts would refer to the attempt of Vietnamese Buddhists to confirm the authority and legitimacy of the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect.

In comparison with the Vinītaruci Thiền sect, Chinese elements were more influential in the Thiền sect established by Vô Ngôn Thông. Evidently, the practice of

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<sup>127</sup> The *Summarized Diagram of Thiền Tradition* introduces a transmission of the Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect which can be found in the *Recorded Sayings of Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ* (慧忠上士語錄 *Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ Ngữ Lục*).

<sup>128</sup> Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 106.

kōan (公案 *công án*), a dominant method of Chinese Southern Chan, was more popular in the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect. This method emphasized the concept of “sudden enlightenment” (頓悟 *đốn ngộ*) based on the teachings of the Sixth Chan Patriarch Huineng of Chan Buddhism while the Vinītaruci’s successors were more drawn to the *dhāraṇī* recitations of Tantric Buddhism.

In the *Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, Vũ Văn Thái remarks two major differences between the Vinītaruci and Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect. First, while the Vinītaruci Thiền sect introduced the method of gradual enlightenment, followers of the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect sought sudden enlightenment. Second, the Vô Ngôn Thông had no esoteric element at first, yet that was absorbed into the practice by the tenth and eleventh generations of this Thiền sect.<sup>129</sup> Recently, Loan Thuy Nguyen’s study of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect in the late twentieth century also agrees with that of Vũ Văn Thái.<sup>130</sup> Notwithstanding, the interaction of these two Thiền sects are more complex.

Vinītaruci was an Indian Brahmanic Buddhist monk who came to China to spread Buddhism and translated Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit to Chinese language. Vinītaruci possibly had contacted with the Chinese Chan school before he propagated Buddhism in Vietnam. Vô Ngôn Thông, a Chinese monk, was a practitioner of the Southern Chan school during the time when the debate between gradual and sudden enlightenment was heating up. In this debate, the latter view sounded more attractive to the followers of the Chinese Southern Chan school. Differences in their backgrounds determined the forms of Buddhism that they introduced to Vietnamese followers. It can

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<sup>129</sup> *Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, s.v. “Vietnam.”

<sup>130</sup> Nguyen, *New Buddhist Movements*, 48, 50.

be concluded that the Vinītaruci Thiền sect had more Indian elements including the practice of *dhāraṇī* recitations as a route to achieve magical powers than Chinese elements, by bonding itself to the idea of Chinese Chan Buddhism. This lineage tradition emphasized the transmission of mind-seal. The Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect had more Chinese elements because it was founded by a Chinese monk who learned Buddhism and was recognized as a Dharma-heir of the Chinese Southern Chan lineage, a specific Chinese tradition of Buddhism.

As for the negotiation of gradual versus sudden enlightenment, the term “gradual enlightenment” does not appear in biographies of eminent monks of either Thiền sects. Although the kōan and references to sudden enlightenment are certainly more influential in the Vô Ngôn Thông, the accounts of Vinītaruci’s successors, such as Pháp Hiền (?-626), Thanh Biện (?-686) and many others, also refer to a moment of sudden enlightenment. For example, when Pháp Hiền met Vinītaruci, “he asked: ‘What is your name, Master?’ Vinītaruci said: ‘You do not have a name?’ Pháp Hiền said: ‘Of course I have a name, but how can you understand it?’ Vinītaruci scolded him, saying: ‘Why use understanding?’ Pháp Hiền abruptly awakened and bowed down...”<sup>131</sup> Similarly, the account of Thanh Biện reads, “... Thanh Biện was about to open his mouth when Huệ Nghiêm suddenly struck him on the mouth with his whist. Thanh Biện was abruptly awakened and bowed down.”<sup>132</sup> Therefore, it is not accurate to say the Vinītaruci emphasized the gradual practice while the Vô Ngôn Thông promoted the method of sudden enlightenment.

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<sup>131</sup> Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 166.

<sup>132</sup> Nguyen, 167.

Taking into account the biography of Cầm Thành, the Dharma-heir of Vô Ngôn Thông, it is worth noting that there was a close connection between his personal practice and that of the Vinītaruci Thiền sect. The *Thiền Uyển* records that he “devoted himself to chanting *dhāraṇīs* and reciting *sūtras*.”<sup>133</sup> In addition, Cầm Thành seemed not to have an intention to give up his practice of chanting *dhāraṇīs* after he received the mind-seal from Vô Ngôn Thông. Therefore, I would not agree with the idea that the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect resisted the Tantric elements of the Vinītaruci Thiền sect at its beginning. The existence of the Vô Ngôn Thông was rather a continuation of a syncretic development of Vietnamese Buddhism.

Thus, the Tantric elements were not limited in Cầm Thành’s personal cultivation but also in the practices of later generations of the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect such as Không Lộ, Giác Hải, and Nguyễn Học. According to the *Thiền Uyển*, Không Lộ was dedicated to chanting *dhāraṇīs* and achieved magical powers such as flying in the air, walking on water, taming tigers, and conquering dragons. Giác Hải was a friend and a Dharma-heir of Không Lộ who was also well-known for his magical skills. He was said to have made a lizard fall or jump up very high into the air merely by his gaze. Nguyễn Học used the *Dhāraṇī of the Fragrant Ocean of Great Compassion* to cure illness and pray for rain. In summary, the Tantric practice was still relevant in the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect even though it was not as popular as it had been in the Vinītaruci.

Instead, an integration between meditation and Pure Land practice was found in biographies of eminent monks of the Vô Ngôn Thông. For instance, Không Lộ was noted to have built a giant Amitābha Buddha statue at Quỳnh Lâm Temple in addition to exhibiting magical skills, and having dedication to meditation practice; he was believed

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<sup>133</sup> Nguyen, 107.

to be reborn in Western Paradise. Tịnh Lực practiced repentance and attained the deep *samādhi* of Amitābha Buddha-contemplation.

Additionally, eminent monks of the Vô Ngôn Thông were also dedicated to observing the Buddhist scriptures. Some influential sūtras that circulated among the monks of this Thiền sect were the *Lotus Sūtra* (Bảo Tính, Minh Tâm, Thông Biện and Chân Không), the *Perfect Enlightenment Sūtra* (Viên Chiếu, Tín Học, Tịnh Lực, and Ngô Ân), the *Vimālakīrti Sūtra* (Cảm Thành, Thiện Hội), the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (Đại Xả), and various others whose names are not referred to specifically (Bảo Giám, Trường Nguyên, and Khuông Việt). There was no conflict between the practice of chanting Buddhist scriptures and meditation in any Thiền sect of Vietnamese Buddhism. Other than that, Buddhist monks devoted their lives to many other practices and activities such as traveling to India to learn Dharma, studying Vinaya, living in solitude and practicing asceticism, engaging in charity works like repairing roadways or bridges, building Buddhist temples or stupas, and participating in the royal courts or political changes of the state.

In summary, both the Vinītaruci and the Vô Ngôn Thông signified a continuous development of a syncretic Vietnamese Buddhism. Elements of different forms of Buddhist practices such as the Theravāda meditation method, Tantric, Pure Land, and the Chinese Chan concurred in any Thiền sect. While the Vinītaruci and the Vô Ngôn Thông arose while Vietnam was under the Chinese domination and lasted until the thirteenth century, the other Thiền sects such as the Thảo Đường, the Trúc Lâm, the Tào Động and the Lâm Tế spread after Vietnam gained its independence. Although they bore different names, their practices were still within the context of Vietnamese syncretic Buddhism.



## II. Dynastic Buddhism

Dynastic Buddhism in Vietnam began along with the establishment of the independent Vietnamese sovereign entities. When different Vietnamese dynasties applied the Chinese model into their political institutions, Vietnamese Buddhism also moved into the sphere of Chinese culture such that Thiền Buddhism was considered a parallel of the Chinese Patriarch Chan tradition. Buddhist monks who allegedly belonged to specific Thiền sects also participated in political, religious, and literary affairs of the state. In this way, the Thiền tradition became the mainstream of Vietnamese dynastic Buddhism.

### 1. Early Vietnamese Dynasties

The downfall of the Chinese Tang dynasty in the tenth century created opportunities for Vietnamese leaders to overturn Chinese rule and establish their independent states in the tenth century. After defeating the Chinese Southern Han state, Ngô Quyền started the Ngô dynasty in 939 as the first Vietnamese independent state after a millennium of Chinese hegemonic rule. However, the Ngô dynasty declined soon after the founder's death. Political turmoils and divisions between the Vietnamese elites and peasants led to the period of “Rebellions of the Twelve Warlords” (*loạn 12 sứ quân*). In 968, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh suppressed the other warlords and started the Đinh dynasty. He took the throne and became Đinh Tiên Hoàng (*The Founding Emperor of the Đinh Dynasty*).<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Vietnamese historical records provide at least three occasions when the Vietnamese rulers claimed themselves as *đế*, i.e., Lý Bí (Lý Nam Đế), Mai Thúc Loan (Mai Hắc Đế) and Đinh Bộ Lĩnh (Đại Thắng Minh Hoàng Đế or Đinh Tiên Hoàng). At no time was Đại Việt as powerful as the medieval Chinese empire in terms of authority and territory but the title of [*hoàng*] *đế* has shown that the Vietnamese always strove for the country's independence and attempted to prove Vietnam's skill and spirit. Historians of the Trần dynasty praised Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, raising him to the status of *hoàng đế* to equalize his role with that of Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤 (r. 960-976), the first emperor of the Chinese Song dynasty.

Đinh Tiên Hoàng named the country Đại Cồ Việt,<sup>135</sup> and moved the capital city to Hoa Lư (modern day Ninh Bình Province). The Vietnamese independent state followed the Chinese model in which the state controlled and unified the religious organizations by appointing religious leaders to hierarchical ranks as governmental officials with titles such as *Tăng Thống* (*The President/Supervisor of Buddhist Sangha*) for Buddhist monks and *Sùng Chân Uy Nghi* (*Noble and Upright Priest*) for Daoist priests. Đinh Tiên Hoàng was the first Vietnamese ruler to attempt to integrate the three religions (Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism) into the political structure of the state. The succeeding dynasties the Former Lê (980-1009), the Lý (1010-1225) and the Trần (1225-1400) continued this tradition in which Vietnamese kings wielded and adjusted their religious powers to strengthen their sovereign states.

Historical records and Buddhist literary writings reveal a strong connection between Buddhism and Vietnamese indigenous religions during this period. In the words of Keith Taylor, “Vietnamese Buddhism up to the tenth century never seemed to have gone far beyond the animist perspective.”<sup>136</sup> Hà Văn Tấn’s study of Buddhist steles of the Đinh dynasty examine the continuous development of Tantric elements alongside Vietnamese popular religions.<sup>137</sup> Recent archaeological findings are in line with accounts of eminent monks of the Vinītaruci and the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sects as mentioned in the previous section. Thus, the incorporation with popular religions led to a familiarity

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<sup>135</sup> This official name shows some links with Buddhism in the word “Cồ” in the family name Cồ Đàm (Gotama) of the historical Shakyamuni Buddha. See Trần, “Đại Cồ Việt,” 53-75.

<sup>136</sup> Taylor, “Authority and Legitimacy,” 161.

<sup>137</sup> Hà, “Cột kinh Phật năm 913,” 39-50; “Cột kinh Phật đời Đinh,” 24-31; *Chùa Việt Nam*, 32-33. Although we do not have a thorough historical record of a development of Tantric Buddhism in Vietnam, Hà Văn Tấn’s findings suggest Tantric elements were essential in popular Vietnamese Buddhism.

with Buddhist temples and monks on the local level. In the same manner, local deities became entwined into the Buddhist worldview, which fulfilled the objective of building a national identity and determining the Vietnamese dynastic authority.

There are three significant aspects of this new stage of Vietnamese Buddhism launched by these early Vietnamese. First, it began a tradition that Buddhist monks held official positions at courts.<sup>138</sup> Second, Buddhism on a larger scale could be associated with popular religions in structuring a national culture. The natural or local deities, heroic or deified figures became inseparable parts of Vietnamese Buddhism. Third was the association of Buddhism with Daoism and Confucianism in the political institution of the state. In this new stage, Thiền Buddhism continued to lead in terms of shaping a national identity or a national culture in medieval Vietnam. The Lý dynasty (1010-1225) witnessed the establishment of the Thảo Đường Thiền sect which was particularly favored among the elite families. The Trần dynasty (1225-1400) introduced the appearance of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect, which was considered as the signature of Vietnamese Thiền Buddhism or an attempt to unify all the existing Thiền sects to portray a composite picture of Thiền Buddhism in Vietnam.

## 2. Thảo Đường Thiền Sect

The *Thiền Uyển* gives a modest description of this Thiền sect in comparison with the Vinītaruci and the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sects. Basically, it is only a list of eighteen names without any detail of their biographies. The account of Thảo Đường is not

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<sup>138</sup> This system allowed Buddhist monks to participate in state affairs such as managing the temples and properties that belonged to Buddhist temples and monasteries. In some cases, Buddhist monks were advisors of the kings who received the Chinese envoys on behalf of state officials. The *Thiền Uyển* recorded how the eminent monks Khuông Việt and Pháp Thuận were involved in state affairs during the Đinh and the Former Lê dynasties.

available in the *Thiền Uyển*, but it is in Vietnamese historical records called the *Primeval Records of Annam* (*An Nam Chí Nguyên*) and the *Brief Records of Annam* (*An Nam Chí Lược*). The historical sources referred to Thảo Đường as the teacher of King Lý Thánh Tông (r. 1054-1072), who was virtuous and well-versed in Buddhist literature.<sup>139</sup> The King captured Thảo Đường during the Đại Việt–Champa war (1069) and ordered him to serve the Monk Scribe (*Tăng Lục*), chief of the monks at court. Yet the Monk Scribe recognized his erudition when Thảo Đường secretly corrected his work. The Monk Scribe then recommended him to the King. Lý Thánh Tông made him the National Preceptor.<sup>140</sup> The *Thiền Uyển* lists King Lý Thánh Tông as a Dharma-heir of Thảo Đường. The Thảo Đường Thiền sect lasted only through the Lý dynasty.<sup>141</sup>

In the subtitle of the Thảo Đường Thiền sect in the *Thiền Uyển*, there is a line that reads, “Thiền Master Thảo Đường of Khai Quốc Temple in the Capital of Thăng Long-Xuedou Mingjue Chan School.” Based on this line, modern scholars have claimed that the continuity of the Yunmen sect of the Southern Chan school in Vietnam began with Thảo Đường. They observed this continuity in how the Thiền sect advocated the harmony between Confucianism and Buddhism, which made many monarchs and court officials successors of Thảo Đường Thiền sect. Because of this relationship, the Thảo Đường Thiền sect had a great influence in the Lý dynasty despite small scale.

Keith Taylor discusses four ways that made the Thảo Đường Thiền sect is different from the Vinītaruci and the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sects, showing its close bond

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<sup>139</sup> In Chapter 3: “Immortals and Buddhist Monks.” See Gaspardne, *Ngan-Nan Tche-Yuan*, 209.

<sup>140</sup> Lê, *An Nam Chí Lược*, 123.

<sup>141</sup> Nguyen, *History of Buddhism*, 112.

with the literati and royal class.<sup>142</sup> Three Lý kings, a prince, and some top official scholars were patriarchs of the Thảo Đường lineage. Additionally, one half of the Dharma successors of this Thiền sect had an association with Buddhist temples though they spent much of their lives as householders, while some others resided in temples that belonged to either the Vinītaruci or the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sects. The existence of literati, the engagement of Thiền Buddhism in the secular world, the usage of poetry that illustrated Buddhist themes to propagate Thiền Buddhism: all were salient features of the Thảo Đường Thiền sect. According to Nguyễn Lang, the Thảo Đường Thiền sect did not last long due to these features, however, as these made their tradition distant from the masses.<sup>143</sup>

Regardless of the scarcity of materials relating to the Thảo Đường Thiền sect, there are some glimpses of its ideology from scattered data of some eminent figures in the list of the Thiền sect's lineage. Likely, its ideology was not so different from the Vinītaruci and the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sects, which is called the syncretic or composite form of practices. Influences of the Pure Land practice with the belief in Amitābha Buddha and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva was found in the article entitled *Truy Tổ Cảnh Sách*, allegedly attributed to Thảo Đường.<sup>144</sup> In addition, Tantric elements were dominant in this Thiền sect via popular figures of Không Lộ and Giác Hải. Interestingly, both the Vô Ngôn Thông and Thảo Đường Thiền sects recognized these two eminent monks as their members. The Khai Quốc Temple in capital of Thăng Long was not only a

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<sup>142</sup> Taylor, "Authority and Legitimacy," 146.

<sup>143</sup> Nguyễn, *Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, 151-152.

<sup>144</sup> Nguyen, *History of Buddhism*, 113.

place where Thảo Đường resided, but other monks of the Vinītaruci sect also lived there. It must be borne in mind that some eminent figures were also associated with different Thiền sects or resided in temples of other traditions.

To draw the link between the Thảo Đường Thiền sect and the Chinese Yunmen Chan tradition, modern scholars have proven the circulation of the *Record Sayings of Xuedou* (雪竇語錄 *Tuyết Đâu Ngữ Lục*) in Vietnam. Nguyễn Lang suggests that Thảo Đường possibly participated in composing this text as well as intentionally expounding its teachings many times at Khai Quốc Temple.<sup>145</sup> Such assumptions are not so convincing as there is no historical or literary evidence that supports his claims. One exception is the *Record Sayings of Xuedou*, which was mentioned once in the *Thiền Uyển* in the account of Quảng Nghiêm (1122-1190), a Dharma successor of the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect. This only suggests the circulation of the text in twelfth century Vietnam, yet it is hard to say whether it was a fixed text that all members of the Thảo Đường Thiền sect in the lineage had to master and transmit. I am inclined to think that eminent monks in medieval Vietnam, regardless of their allegedly Thiền sects, would study any Buddhist texts that were available to them. This would explain the interest of Quảng Nghiêm in the *Record Sayings of Xuedou* even though he was considered to be a member of the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect.

According to Cuong Tu Nguyen, Thảo Đường's Buddhism was "a mixture of Mahāyāna and Brahmanism"<sup>146</sup> and he would have been a personal religious teacher of King Lý Thánh Tông. In explaining his claims, Cuong Tu Nguyen raises the composite

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<sup>145</sup> Nguyễn, *Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, 150.

<sup>146</sup> Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 54.

religious viewpoint of Lý Thánh Tông. Despite being a devout Buddhist, the King also supported Confucianism, Brahmanism, and other religions. In 1057, he even built temples to worship Brahmā and Indra.<sup>147</sup> Thảo Đường had lived in Champa where Brahmanism was influential before he was captured by Lý Thánh Tông. One of his lineage's supposed successors, Phạm Âm (n.d), had an Indian name. It would be impossible to measure the Indian elements in the Thảo Đường lineage. However, there would be an interest in Indian religions among successors of this Thiền sect. This would explain why Thông Biện completely left out the lineage of Thảo Đường, just like those of Đại Điền and Bát Nhã, which had been omitted when discussing the transmission of Thiền Buddhism in Vietnam with the Empress Dowager in 1036.

Judging from religious components of the Thảo Đường Thiền sect, it still shared an ecumenical spirit like the cases of the Vinītaruci and the Vô Ngôn Thông. The royal patronage and elite figures associated with these Thiền sects. However, the Thảo Đường might have favored a stronger connection with the aristocrats as its founder was King Lý Thánh Tông's personal teacher and many supposed successors of this lineage belonged to the royal families. The appearance of the so-called Thảo Đường Thiền sect also signified an influential lay Buddhist community in Vietnam during the Lý dynasty while its followers mostly pursued the householder life. The royal patronage and the engaged lay community later became the foundation of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect in the Trần dynasty.

In conclusion, the arising of the Thảo Đường Thiền sect was a continuous development of a syncretic and composite Vietnamese Buddhism during the Lý dynasty. A list of names of supposed successors of the Thảo Đường's lineage without any detailed biographies, as well as Thông Biện's silence of the existence of the Thiền sect, might

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<sup>147</sup> *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 1, 288.

have raised doubts about the existence of this Thiền sect. Nevertheless, its influences among the aristocratic circles and the lay community as well as the introduction of the “recorded sayings” (*ngữ lục*) literature of the Chinese Chan Buddhism helped Vietnamese Buddhists to incorporate the Chan ideology into their composite religious worldview.

### 3. Trúc Lâm Yên Tử Thiền Sect

To the Trần dynasty (1225-1400), the Chinese Chan Patriarch tradition became more influential among Vietnamese Buddhists. Aside from the “recorded sayings” genre of Buddhist literature which had been introduced into Vietnam in the Lý dynasty, the *Thiền Uyển*, a text of “transmission of the lamp” genre, was composed during the Trần dynasty, probably under imperial decree. Historical sources also recorded the arrivals of many Chinese monks belonging to the Linji or Caodong schools during the Trần which made Thiền an orthodox transmission of Buddhism in the mind of contemporary Vietnamese Buddhists.

The Trần rulers, beginning with Trần Thái Tông, abdicated the throne in favor of their successors and became “retired emperors” (*thái thượng hoàng*) when they were still healthy. The retired emperors, while helping the young kings to rule the state, would nevertheless also go on retreat at Mount Yên Tử (present day Quảng Ninh Province) and become religious leaders. With regard to worldly affairs, they promoted the ideology of unity of the three religions, in which Confucianism were favored. However, they would treat Buddhism as the most profound teachings for soteriological goals.

The Trúc Lâm Yên Tử (later as known as the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect) was a lineage of Mount Yên Tử that was related to the transmission of the Chinese Linji Chan school



by the late Lý dynasty. According to the *Lược Dẫn Thiền Phái Đồ*, the first patriarch of this Thiền sect was Thông Thiền (?-1228) who belonged to the thirteenth generation of the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect, according to the records of the *Thiền Uyển*. Nevertheless, Phúc Điền's *Kế Đăng Lục* claimed Hiện Quang (?-1221) as belonging to the fourteenth generation of the Vô Ngôn Thông Thiền sect, according to *Thiền Uyển*, as the founder of Mount Yên Tử's lineage. In either text, the Vô Ngôn Thông seemed to have a stronger influence among Vietnamese Buddhists in this period compared with the Vinītaruci and the Thảo Đường Thiền sects. Although these two texts provided two different lineages of transmission of the Yên Tử's tradition, many successors were eminent Song monks who came to Vietnam to transmit the teaching of the Linji school, such as Đại Đăng, Ứng Thuận, Thiên Phong, and Tiêu Diêu. Phúc Điền even claimed Trần Nhân Tông, the founder of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect, was the sixth patriarch of the Lâm Tế (Linji) Thiền sect of Vân Tiêu Temple (Mount Yên Tử).

Based on pieces of information from the *Lược Dẫn Thiền Phái Đồ* and the *Kế Đăng Lục*, we could see that the Chinese Linji monks just became part of the existing Thiền sects of Vietnam, especially the Vô Ngôn Thông, since this “school” was more influential. According to Nguyễn Lang, the occasion that Thường Chiếu (?-1203), master of Hiện Quang, residing and teaching the Dharma at the Lục Tổ Temple (belonging to the Vinītaruci Thiền sect), suggests the blending together of the Vô Ngôn Thông and the Vinītaruci Thiền sect together by the end of the Lý dynasty. The Thảo Đường Thiền sect later declined because it lacked support from the masses.<sup>148</sup> Consequently, the Yên Tử marked beginning of the merging of all previous Thiền sects

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<sup>148</sup> Nguyễn, *Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, 171.

during the Trần dynasty. This early stage of Yên Tử's tradition was a preparation for the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect of Trần Nhân Tông in the thirteenth century of the Trần Buddhism.

The Yên Tử tradition had a direct connection with Trần Thái Tông, the author of the *Essays* including the *Procedure*. According to the *Kể Đăng Lược Lục*, Trần Thái Tông studied with Đạo Viên (National Preceptor Trúc Lâm) and afterward achieved mind-seal from Thiên Phong, a Chinese Linji lay practitioner.<sup>149</sup> Trần Thái Tông's successor, king Trần Thánh Tông, received the transmission from National Preceptor Đại Đăng. And the third king of the Trần dynasty, Trần Nhân Tông, became the founder of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect who received the transmission from Eminent Tuệ Trung (Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ), a lay practitioner. The involvement of the Trần kings into the Yên Tử lineage was one of the most significant features of this unified Thiền sect.

The ascendance of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect was the most important accomplishment of Thiền Buddhism in medieval Vietnam. According to Cuong Tu Nguyen, the Trúc Lâm was “the first serious effort to establish a Zen school in medieval Vietnam.”<sup>150</sup> The aim of this effort was to legitimize the orthodoxy of Vietnamese Buddhism for the sake of proving a continuum of the Chinese Chan tradition in the lineage of the Trúc Lâm. In the discourse of Vietnamese Buddhism, the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect was an outcome of gradual accumulations of previous developments. Historically, this was the first Buddhist tradition founded by a Vietnamese ruler on Vietnamese soil. In other words, the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect was a means to demonstrate the maturity of

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<sup>149</sup> A complete biography of Trần Thái Tông will be discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>150</sup> Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, 20.

Vietnamese Buddhism by legitimizing its orthodoxy and defining a cultural and religious identity of Vietnamese Buddhists through many centuries.

The fact that the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect, which was founded by King Trần Nhân Tông, merged with an eagerness to define a unique Vietnamese Buddhist tradition has led modern scholars into debates regarding the so-called “purity” (*thuần túy*) of Vietnamese Buddhism. Two tendencies have arisen in this debate. One group—including most Buddhist scholars in Vietnam such as Lê Mạnh Thát, Nguyễn Tài Thư, Thích Phước Đạt, Nguyễn Duy Hinh, and others—has emphasized the Trúc Lâm as a “pure” Vietnamese Thiền sect, a signature of Vietnamese Buddhism. Another group has claimed it as “a national symbol of Vietnamese independence as a response to Vietnamese *de-Sinicization* efforts”<sup>151</sup> while accepting the synthesized character of Vietnamese Buddhism. The second approach is that of Thích Nhất Hạnh, Cuong Tu Nguyen, Don Thuong Trieu, notwithstanding of some differences among their interpretations.

Considering the long discourse of Vietnamese Buddhism, it could be seen how Buddhism gradually merged into both indigenous beliefs and foreign religions as well as different Buddhist traditions. The Trúc Lâm Thiền sect was founded in that context. Therefore, it is impossible to assert a “pure” form of Vietnamese Buddhism that does not have the synthesized character. I am inclined to think that there was no such thing called “pure” Vietnamese Buddhism even though Vietnamese Buddhists have been dedicated to defining their Buddhist identity throughout the history. If the uniqueness of Vietnamese Buddhism must be determined, it would be the composite and blending character that makes it so.

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<sup>151</sup> Don Thuong Trieu provided a brief review of this debate. See Trieu, “Lacquered Thiền,” 3.

In conclusion, syncretism was one of the main characters of Vietnamese Buddhism. It was the attitude of the Vietnamese people who welcomed and let Buddhism be absorbed into their indigenous religions. Syncretism also functioned in the co-existence of the three religions. Additionally, due to this character, Vietnamese Buddhism went beyond the idea of sectarianism during both early and dynastic periods. At the same time, Vietnamese Buddhists observed and followed the Chinese interpretation of Buddhism through the lens of the Chan/Thiền tradition. During the dynastic period, Vietnamese Buddhism became identified with the Thiền tradition. The *Thiền Uyển* played a significant role in shaping this understanding of Vietnamese Buddhist history as the author brought up the three Thiền sects: the Vinītaruci, the Vô Ngôn Thông and the Thảo Đường.

When observing biographies of eminent monks of the three Thiền sects as recorded in the *Thiền Uyển*, we could easily recognize the composite practices of these Buddhist figures. Every Thiền sect included different elements of Buddhist teachings and practices such as those of Tantric Buddhism, the Pure Land, the Chinese Chan tradition, and so forth. Through the process of syncretism, the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect was founded during the Trần dynasty when the state enjoyed socio-political stability, and the ruling class was interested in Buddhist practices and used Buddhism to consolidate the national strength. The Trúc Lâm Thiền sect was not a sudden outcome but rather a ripe fruit of the long process that Vietnamese Buddhists tried to define their cultural and religious identity in the conversation with its Chinese counterpart.

By the Tang and Song dynasties, the Chan tradition became a dominant school of Buddhism in China. Vietnamese intellectuals including Buddhist monks and Confucian

scholars were fascinated by the Chan kōans, and lineages of transmission of the mind-seal. During the Lý and the Trần dynasties, the Chinese Chan caught the attention of the Vietnamese ruling class. The engagement of the royal members in so-called Thiền sects in Vietnam, and the introduction of “transmission of lamp” and “recorded sayings” genres of Buddhist literature established a Thiền-centered orthodoxy of Vietnamese Buddhism. This resolve of orthodoxy has led to a tendency to interpreting Thiền tradition as the mainstream of Buddhism in Vietnam. Nevertheless, I would interpret this tradition as a syncretic form of Vietnamese Buddhism in which the Chinese Chan ideology was the center among other elements of Indian, Chinese, and Vietnamese religions.

## Chapter Three:

### Biography of King Trần Thái Tông

The chapter will present a biography of Trần Thái Tông, the first King of the Trần dynasty (r. 1225-1258) and author of the *Essays*, as both a political and religious leader. This “divine-king” model was one of the features of the Trần Buddhism. At this time, Buddhism was seen an effective means to strengthen national power since Vietnamese imperial dynasties were in continuous resistance with the Chinese, who were motivated by the political ideal of a Central Kingdom. Trần Thái Tông-as a religious leader who was inclined to Buddhist teachings-placed Buddhism in a harmonious co-existence with the three religions, but also promulgated a syncretic form of Buddhist teachings and practices that was in line with the syncretic character of Vietnamese Buddhism in general. A thorough exploration of Trần Thái Tông’s background is essential for grasping his understanding of Buddhism as presented in the *Essays*.

To complete this task, the chapter will investigate the King’s accounts in both official and semi-official historical sources.<sup>152</sup> Some important historical sources to mention to Trần Thái Tông were the *Historical Records of Great Việt* (大越史記 *Đại Việt Sử Ký*), the *Complete Book of Historical Records of Great Việt* (大越史記全書 *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*), the *Brief History of Việt* (越史略 *Việt Sử Lược* or 大越史略 *Đại Việt Sử Lược*), the *Model Cases from Việt History* (越史標案 *Việt Sử Tiêu Án*), the *Imperially Ordered Annotated Text Completely Reflecting the History of Việt* (欽定越史

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<sup>152</sup> Originally, the primary historical resources were in classical Chinese, and were translated into modern Vietnamese language in the twentieth century. This study uses these translations, otherwise it will be noted. These historical annals and records were written for the most part by Confucian scholars during the Trần, Lê, and Nguyễn dynasties. Hence, their annotations to some extents were based on the Confucian values; some judgmental tensions toward Trần Thái Tông’s support to Buddhism.

通鑑綱目 *Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục*), and the *Activities of the Royal Members of the Trần Dynasty* (陳朝世譜行狀 *Trần Triều Thế Phả Hành Trạng*). These historical sources provide rich information about the political life of the King and his contributions to the state in the role of a political leader.

The chapter also provides a reading of two Chinese historical compositions that are related to the history of Vietnam. The *Brief Records of Annam* (安南志略 *An Nam Chí Lược*) was written by Lê Tắc, a royal member of the Trần dynasty who was considered as an exiled Vietnamese in China, and the *Primeval Records of Annam* (安南志原 *An Nam Chí Nguyên*), which was the work of a Chinese official. These two sources present a Chinese perspective of Vietnamese history and culture that include some important accounts that are missing from the Vietnamese sources. Using them in a critical way would offer an all-encompassing account of Trần Thái Tông's life and views.

Regarding the religious dimension of the King's life, the chapter will discuss his own narrative as written in his *Essays*. In addition, the chapter considers some Buddhist sources of the Trần dynasty such as the *Biographies of the Awakened Ones* (聖登錄 *Thánh Đăng Lục*, hereafter referred to as TDL); and the *Transmission of Essential Teachings of Thiền Buddhism during the Trần Dynasty in Vietnamese Vernacular* (禪宗本行 *Thiền Tông Bản Hạnh* or 陳朝禪宗指南傳心國語行 *Trần Triều Thiền Tôn Chỉ Nam Truyền Tâm Quốc Ngữ Hành*). These sources provide the King's approach to Buddhism.

The chapter reviews the King's life in chronological order. To balance the political and religious roles of Trần Thái Tông, I will focus on the four most significant

events. Firstly, there is event that Trần Thái Tông's ascendance to the throne, at which time power was transferred from the Lý to the Trần dynasty. This event relates to the political marriage of the last king of the Lý dynasty, Lý Huệ Tông, and Trần Thị Dung, and the manipulations of Trần Thủ Độ in the early marriage of Trần Cảnh-Trần Thái Tông<sup>153</sup> and Chiêu Thánh. Secondly, there is the attempt of renunciation that Trần Thái Tông made in 1236 due to further involvement of Trần Thủ Độ into his marriages. This event led to his encounter with the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm in Mount Yên Tử.<sup>154</sup> After meeting with the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm, Trần Thái Tông developed his own approach to Buddhism. Thirdly, the King's leadership in the Đại Việt-Mongol war in 1257-1258 was one of his great contributions to the foreign affairs of the Trần dynasty. Lastly, his abdication of the throne in 1258 introduced a new form of power-transmission between the Trần kings. I explore these four events since they provide a complete picture of the King either as a political ruler or a religious leader.

## I. The Coronation (1225)

The marriage of Trần Thái Tông and Chiêu Thánh was the decisive event that led to the establishment of the Trần dynasty in 1225. The *An Nam Chí Lược* is the earliest

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<sup>153</sup> Trần Cảnh or Trần Nhật Cảnh is the real name of Trần Thái Tông. As his royal title, Trần Thái Tông, is more familiar with the Vietnamese Buddhist readers, I will refer to this royal title throughout the dissertation. His real name is only used while discussing the history and biography of Trần Thái Tông prior to his enthronement in 1225.

<sup>154</sup> In the *Toàn Thư*, he was called the National Preceptor Phù Vân who dwelled in Mount Yên Tử belonging to present day Quảng Ninh Province. Nguyễn Lang doubted the accuracy of the *Toàn Thư* because Phù Vân was another name of Tĩnh Lự who was a disciple of An Tâm and the tenth successor of the Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect. Trần Thái Tông called him the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm—the Great Śramaṇa. See Nguyễn, *Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, 178.

According to Buddhist sources such as TĐL, *Thiền Tông Bản Hạnh*, *Đại Nam Thiền Uyển Kế Đăng Lục*, and *Thiền Uyển*, Trúc Lâm named Viên Chứng or Đạo Viên, the monastic disciple of Hiện Quang (? – 1221), who resided in Mount Yên Tử after Hiện Quang had passed away. Trúc Lâm was the name of the Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect. In Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, the place's name was sometimes used when referring to the name of a monk who was residing there as a way of showing respect. Calling Trúc Lâm “the Great Śramaṇa” or the “National Preceptor Phù Vân” in different Buddhist texts and historical records is done so out of respect.



historical source to record the coronation of Trần Thái Tông. The *Toàn Thư* and the *Việt Sử Lược* also provide details of the process by which the Trần clan overthrew the Lý dynasty and assumed the state power, which lasted from the reign of Lý Cao Tông (r. 1175-1210) until Trần Thái Tông's enthronement. While the *Việt Sử Lược* offers a slightly different account of Trần Thái Tông's enthronement, other historical sources consistently recognize the significant role of Trần Thủ Độ<sup>155</sup> in scheming the downfall of the Lý dynasty and the rise to power of the Trần family. Trần Thủ Độ was also the person behind the political marriages of Trần Thái Tông, first with Chiêu Thánh and later with her elder sister, Thuận Thiên.

The first political marriage paved the way for Trần Thái Tông to become the first king of the Trần dynasty, while the second one led him toward the idea of leaving state affairs, wanting to become a Buddhist monk, and leaning toward religious practices. This section will consider how the political marriage of Trần Thái Tông and Chiêu Thánh took place, leading to the founding of the Trần dynasty. By looking into different historical sources, I would argue that political marriages helped the Trần clan to seize and maintain state power. Nevertheless, political marriages marked scandalous stains in Trần Thái Tông's personal life from a moral or ethical perspective, especially with respect to the marriage with Thuận Thiên, which I will discuss in the next section of the chapter.

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<sup>155</sup> Trần Thủ Độ (1194-1264) is a controversial figure in the history of Vietnam. He was credited for the establishment of the Trần dynasty. Yet he made ruthless decisions to annihilate members of the Lý family and was involved in the scandalous marriages of Trần Thái Tông with the two princesses Thuận Thiên and Chiêu Thánh. Trần Thủ Độ requested to change the Lý family name to the Nguyễn with an excuse of abstention from the name of Trần Lý, an ancestor of the Trần family. This scheming was for the sake of discarding the seeds of remembrance and restoring the power for the Lý family.

In addition, his marriage with Trần Thị Dung, the ex-wife of Lý Huệ Tông, began the tradition of consanguineous marriages among members of the Trần royal family. The excuse given for this form of consanguineous marriages was to guarantee the power of the Trần clan during the time of the Trần dynasty. The Confucian scholars and historians strongly criticized the consanguineous marriages among the members of the Trần royal family as an incestuous shame.

Historically, the changing dynasties in medieval Vietnam were marked by the transfer of the political power from one specific family to another. This could be initiated by a weakness within the royal family, fights over the supreme power among princes, natural disasters, corruptions, social instability, rebellions or civil wars, or wars with the neighboring countries like China and Champa.<sup>156</sup> Additionally, there would be an arising into power of another family, which would then start to take credit for stabilizing the state and to having control of the army. The enthronement of Trần Thái Tông took place in a similar context.

The decline of the Lý dynasty began during the reign of Lý Cao Tông when the King had to fight against his elder brother for the throne. This led to a division in the court. Lý Cao Tông was known for indulging in sensual pleasures with his concubines while travelling and building more palaces. Yet during a famine in 1179-1180, that was caused by floods and earthquakes, he was seen to be ignoring the victims. These natural disasters were where “almost half of the population died of hunger.”<sup>157</sup> In addition, another severe flood hit Đại Việt in 1199, destroying crops, resulting in the starvation and death of many Vietnamese. Hunger remained a major problem while floods, earthquakes, and storms were occurring almost every year.<sup>158</sup> The subsequent increase in banditry all over the country challenged the Lý family’s leadership. The country was in turmoil, and chiefs of minority groups who lived in the bordering regions also tried to expand their

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<sup>156</sup> Champa (or Chiêm Thành) was a kingdom of Cham polities that existed from the second century to 1892, when it was annexed by Minh Mạng, the second king of the Nguyễn dynasty of Vietnam. The kingdom was located in present-day South-central Vietnam, and was previously known as the country of Lâm Ấp (Linyi 林邑).

<sup>157</sup> *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 1, 349.

<sup>158</sup> Đào, *Lịch Sử Việt Nam*, 214. From the perspective of Confucian historians, natural disasters are bad omens for the fall of a dynasty. They are signs that the current dynasty is losing the Mandate of Heaven.

territories. Powerful families and clans started to build their powers and influences, especially those along the coast.<sup>159</sup>

The Trần family was one of the powerful clans at that time. Trần Lý, the grandfather of Trần Cảnh, helped Lý Cao Tông to suppress the uprising of Quách Bốc in 1209. The Trần family also protected Prince Lý Sảm, the successor of Lý Cao Tông. Prince Lý Sảm enthroned as Lý Huệ Tông (r. 1211-1224) and got married to a daughter of Trần Lý, Trần Thị Dung. Lý Huệ Tông was said to have no male heir and was required to confer the title of “crown prince” to Chiêu Thánh, his second daughter with Trần Thị Dung. Soon after the enthronement of Chiêu Thánh in 1224, the Trần family assumed power of the state by means of another political marriage of Chiêu Thánh and Trần Cảnh.

Historical sources reveal that during the transition of the state power of the two families, Trần Thủ Độ was the most important figure who helped the Trần clan to overthrow the Lý dynasty. After forcing Lý Huệ Tông to reside at Chân Giáo Buddhist Temple, Chiêu Thánh became the Empress Regnant of Đại Việt. The seven-year-old Chiêu Thánh was too young to rule the country. Therefore, the real power was already in the hands of Trần Thủ Độ and Trần Thị Dung, who were leaders of the Trần clan at that time.

After Chiêu Thánh enthroned, Trần Thủ Độ arranged for Trần Cảnh to assume the position of imperial attendant of the Queen. Trần Cảnh was chosen because he was around the same age as the Queen and was a successor of the Trần family. Due to manipulations of Trần Thủ Độ, Trần Cảnh became the Queen’s husband in a short time after their encounter. Less than a year after their marriage, Chiêu Thánh was forced to resign her legitimate throne on behalf of her husband. The Trần dynasty was officially

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<sup>159</sup> Vu and Sharrock, *Descending Dragon, Rising Tiger*, 78.

established in 1225, and Trần Cảnh then became known as Trần Thái Tông. Historical records reveal that there was no involvement of military in the usurpation of the Trần family either before or after the enthronement of Trần Thái Tông.

Regarding the enthronement of Trần Thái Tông, the *An Nam Chí Lược* offers a brief account that reads, “He belongs to the second generation [of the Trần family], the second son of Thái Tổ, who is generous, benevolent, and intelligent. [He is] both scholar and a warrior having become son-in-law of the Lý dynasty then taking over the country.”<sup>160</sup> The *Việt Sử Lược* offers a different understanding of this event. It claims the marriage of Chiêu Thánh and Trần Cảnh as well as the enthronement of the Trần king were decisions of Lý Huệ Tông after he had discussed these matters with Phùng Tá Chu, his loyal subject.<sup>161</sup> This emphasizes the role of the last Lý king in the transition of power.

The author of the *Việt Sử Lược*, a chronicle was written during the Trần dynasty, sided with the Trần family by claiming that the transition of power between the two dynasties was made for appearances. According to the *Việt Sử Lược*, Lý Huệ Tông claimed that he had no heir because he was unrighteous and shameless to Heaven. Realizing that Trần Cảnh’s extraordinary appearance was helpful in pacifying the state, Lý Huệ Tông wished for him to be his son-in-law and to rule the country. Obviously, those claims served a purpose in explaining the so-called appropriate usurpation of the Trần clan. Following that, the marriage of Trần Cảnh and Chiêu Thánh and the coronation of the first Trần king were said to follow the will of Heaven.

If these records were true, Lý Huệ Tông would not have been driven to suicide and other members of the Lý royal family would not have fled or been mercilessly killed

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<sup>160</sup> Lê, *An Nam Chí Lược*, 105.

<sup>161</sup> *Việt Sử Lược*, 199-200.

by Trần Thủ Độ. In this way, Lý Huệ Tông would pass the throne to his sibling or a nephew of the Lý dynasty, instead of passing it to the eight-year-old Trần Cảnh who belonged to another family. These excuses had been concealed for the sake of the Trần family, including Trần Thủ Độ's scheme for usurpation. Regardless of the fact that it is one of the earliest historical records of the Trần dynasty, the account of Trần Thái Tông's enthronement in the *Việt Sử Lược* is not reliable.

In the *Toàn Thư*, annals written by Ngô Sĩ Liên which were completed in 1479 and based on the *Đại Việt Sử Ký* of Lê Văn Hưu and the *Supplementary Edition of the Annals of Great Việt* (大越史記續編 *Đại Việt Sử Ký Tục Biên*) of Phan Phu Tiên, roles of Lý Huệ Tông and Phùng Tá Chu were negligible in the event of changing dynasty. The annals say:

In the second year of Thiên Chương Hữu Đạo, in the Year of Rooster (1225), during the winter of the tenth month (...) Trần Thủ Độ took charge of the royal guards (Điện tiền chỉ huy sứ) who looked after the military affairs in the [capital] city. Trần Thủ Độ's nephews were Trần Bất Cập, Trần Thiêm and Trần Cảnh (Cảnh was later known as Trần Thái Tông), and they were trusted servants of the Empress. Cảnh, who was eight years old that year, served outside of the Empress's chamber.

On one particular day, he was responsible for carrying the foot-wash water. And so he walked inside the chamber. Seeing [him], Chiêu Hoàng<sup>162</sup> was pleased. She called him to come to play with her every night after that, and she teased him, touched his hair, and stepped on his shadow when he was standing in the dark. There was one time when Cảnh was holding the water basket: she splashed him with water, and then had a good laugh. When Cảnh brought the betel scarf, she threw the scarf to him. Cảnh dared not to say a word [to her] yet told Trần Thủ Độ in secret. Thủ Độ said: "If that is the case, would our [the Trần] family become royalty, or would that be an offense against the sovereign?" On another day, Chiêu Hoàng threw the betel scarf to Cảnh again. The latter bowed to her and asked: "Your Majesty, would you forgive me? I would submit myself to you." Chiêu Hoàng smiled and said: "[I] forgive you. Now you know how to talk wisely."

After going back [home], Cảnh explained [what happened] to Thủ Độ. Afraid that the whole family would be killed, Thủ Độ brought all [of Trần's]

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<sup>162</sup> Lý Chiêu Hoàng is the royal title of Chiêu Thánh.

relatives to the Forbidden Palace. Thủ Độ gave orders to close the capital city's gates and all the entrances to the palace, and to have guards keep the mandarins from entering to attend court. Thủ Độ [then] announced that: "Her Majesty is married already." All officials were at his beck and call asking him for a date to attend the court.

On the twenty-first of that month, the officials attended the Empress's court and congratulated them. [The Empress] issued this royal statement: "Since ancient times, our Nam Việt had kings who ruled the world. Only my Lý family did follow the will of Heaven, had the four oceans, and the throne had been passed down by sagacious kings for over two hundred years; yet my father [the former king] was sick and had no heir, thereby placing the country in chaos. [He] let me be his successor, [unprecedented] for an empress. There were difficulties because this had never happened before. Unfortunately, as an empress who lacks talent and virtue, [I] have had no assistance while bandits rebelled everywhere. How could I keep this throne having such high responsibilities? I am working hard day and night, yet still afraid of not being capable enough to handle it. I have always tried to find a gentleman to help me take care of political affairs, for which I have pleaded night after night.

*Shijing/Kinh Thi* said, 'For a long time, the gentlemen have not found their mates, making them sleepless.' Considering [this matter], I have realized that there is only Trần Cảnh who is qualified enough, living the way of a gentleman, righteous and decent. Having qualities of both scholar and warrior, he is incomparable, regardless of Han Gaozu/Hán Cao Tổ or Tang Taizong/Đường Thái Tông. I have contemplated [these matters] for such a long time and have decided to abdicate so that [Trần Cảnh] may fulfill the will of Heaven and my wishes. Hoping that together with me, he would help the fate of the country [for which everyone] would enjoy good fortune and peace. I would officially proclaim this to all people in the realm."

On the eleventh day (the day of Tiger - Mậu Dần) of the twelfth month, Chiêu Hoàng organized a great festival at Thiên An Palace. Sitting on the golden throne, all subjects on their official robes were kneeling in the court. Chiêu Hoàng then took off her imperial mantle and invited Trần Cảnh to take the throne. He changed the Imperial Year into Kiến Trung the first year, ordered general amnesty, and called himself Thiệu Hoàng, which later changed into Văn Hoàng. His subjects offered Khải Thiên Lập Cực Chí Nhân Chương Hiếu Hoàng Đế as his imperial title. He granted Trần Thủ Độ the position of National Chancellor (*Thượng Phụ*) and he helped the King to rule the country.<sup>163</sup>

In the annals, the roles of Lý Huệ Tông, Phùng Tá Chu, and even Trần Thái Tông's father (Trần Thừa) were cast away, and only the role of Trần Thủ Độ was recorded. Later historical records and literary works have made the *Toàn Thư* the primary source of this event because this official record offers the most detailed account on Trần

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<sup>163</sup> *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 1, 363-364.

Thái Tông's coronation in 1225. Historical sources also praise Trần Thái Tông in terms of his personal character, attributing qualities like talented, humble, righteous, and decent, and claiming that he had "qualities of both a scholar and a warrior." Those comments justify his role as a benevolent king from the Confucian viewpoint.

In conclusion, the enthronement of Trần Thái Tông marked a peaceful transition of power from the Lý to the Trần dynasty. Trần Thủ Độ was known as a decisive figure who was behind the changing dynasties and issued the royal power to the Trần family in all available Vietnamese historical records. The Trần dynasty was successful in using political marriages to seize the state power as well as maintaining it during the early stages. However, scandals in political marriages were unforgettable stains on the life of Trần Thái Tông from the moral perspective. Those scandals might have driven the King's devotions toward Buddhism and repentance practice.

## **II. The Attempt of Renunciation (1236)**

The event that determined Trần Thái Tông's departure from the state affairs was when he went to Mount Yên Tử and presented his wish to become a Buddhist monk. This marked a turning point in the life of the King's role as political leader. As a consequence of this event, Trần Thái Tông somehow resolved the issue around his marital scandals with those who had been involved and began to rule the state on his own. The encounter with National Preceptor Trúc Lâm at Mount Yên Tử also helped Trần Thái Tông to determine his approach toward Buddhism and thus became a Buddhist apologist.

### **1. Historical Background of the Event**

The main reason for Trần Thái Tông's attempt at renunciation was the meddling of Trần Thủ Độ and Trần Thị Dung in his second political marriage with Thuận Thiên.

Historical records reveal that as soon as the Trần dynasty had been established, Trần Thị Dung, the late queen, was demoted to the rank of princess and was called Thiên Cực. She was then re-married to Trần Thủ Độ, her cousin brother. The couple had arranged and meddled with the marriages of the two princesses of the late Lý dynasty-Thuận Thiên and Chiêu Thánh-and the two brothers of the Trần family-Trần Liễu and Trần Thái Tông-to enhance the power of the Trần family as well as to ensure the solidity of the new dynasty.

To provide further detail on the matter: Trần Thái Tông was said to have deposed Chiêu Hoàng and married his sister-in-law, Thuận Thiên, who had been three months pregnant with Trần Liễu. This happened because Chiêu Hoàng had showed signs of infertility and produced no heir after ten years of their marriage.<sup>164</sup> Emphasizing the roles of Trần Thủ Độ and Trần Thị Dung in this involvement, the Vietnamese annals say:

[The King] took the wife of Hoài Vương Liễu, his elder brother, Princess Thuận Thiên of the Lý family, to be his Queen called Queen Thuận Thiên, and Chiêu Thánh was demoted to a princess. At that time, Chiêu Thánh had no heir, while Thuận Thiên was three months pregnant of Quốc Khang. [That was] a scheme of Trần Thủ Độ and Princess Thiên Cực to which the King was told to impersonate

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<sup>164</sup> For the feudal political system of medieval Vietnam, providing a King's heir was the mandatory way of promising the continuity of a dynasty. Having taken over the power by means of royal marriage after only ten years, the Trần dynasty was quite young, and so the King's heir was essential to justify usurpation. This was one of the major internal challenges that Trần Thái Tông had to take on as a responsibility for a king.

In addition, the threat of the Mongol Empire from the Northern China when they had grown rapidly, as the latter had conquered different parts of China and other regions such as Western Xia (Tangut), Central Asia, Mongolia, and Hexi Corridor during the ruling of Genghis Khan (r. 1206-1227). After Genghis Khan passed away, his successor, Ögedei Khan (r. 1229-1241), defeated Western Xia in 1227 and conquered the Jin dynasty of the Jurchen in 1234 in alliance with the Southern Song of the Han people. Soon after the fall of the Jin dynasty, the Mongols started wars with the Southern Song in 1235. During those years, Trần Thủ Độ and Trần Thị Dung recognized the risk of war with the Mongols as well, which led them to force the King to take over his brother's pregnant wife as a temporary method of responding to this crisis. Thus, the Mongols attacked Đại Việt for the first time in 1257-1258, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Historically Quốc Khang, the son of Trần Liễu and Thuận Thiên, was not chosen to be the crown prince for the second prince, Trần Hoảng, was born in 1240. As Trần Thái Tông's own son, Trần Hoảng was made the crown prince immediately. Nevertheless, history is unchangeable. The act of taking his brother's wife was a dishonorable affair in Trần Thái Tông's life. This mistake would have made the King seek refuge in repentance practice as he wrote and practiced the *Procedure*.



[that he was the father of Thuận Thiên's child] for later assistance. Therefore, the order was granted.<sup>165</sup>

This meddling put the two brothers and two sisters in an awkward and conflicted situation. As a ruler in a dynastic period, guaranteeing of a successor was important for uniting the royal court, especially in a new reign of a new dynasty, as in the case of Trần Thái Tông. Nevertheless, this would be an unforgivable and unforgettable episode in the marital lives of both couples from an ethical perspective. In addition, Trần Thái Tông would have to find an appropriate way to deal with related parties, especially with his elder brother. It would be immoral if he annihilated Trần Liễu, and leaving Trần Liễu alone would be a threat to his own safety and the state because Trần Liễu would take revenge. Soon after this scandal occurred, Trần Liễu was indeed ablaze with anger. He gathered troops and revolted against Trần Thái Tông at the Cái River.

Having known that it was impossible for him to go against their decisions,<sup>166</sup> the King left the palace secretly at night and found his way to Mount Yên Tử with the intention of renunciation. At first, this was an escape-or a rebellious act-on the part of Trần Thái Tông, from the arranged marriage with Thuận Thiên. Despite failing to become a Buddhist monk, Trần Thái Tông made his own decision to resolve conflicts with Trần Liễu without any involvement from Trần Thủ Độ. In addition, this attempt also helped the King to determine his devotion to Buddhist belief and practices after his encounter with the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm. Trần Thái Tông then came to the

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<sup>165</sup> *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 17.

<sup>166</sup> During the first ten years of Trần Thái Tông's reign, the real power was in the hands of National Chancellor Trần Thủ Độ, who put Trần Thái Tông on the throne and founded the Trần dynasty. In this scandalous interfering, either Trần Thái Tông, Chiêu Thánh or Trần Liễu, Thuận Thiên were just pawns on the political chessboard. When everything was done for the sake of the Trần dynasty, it would be impossible for the King to go against it even though it related to his personal life.

understanding that “the Buddha is in the Mind” (*Phật tại tâm*) and pursued the life of a devout Buddhist.

## 2. The King’s Narrative

Another important source for understanding Trần Thái Tông’s reasons and intentions behind this attempt of renunciation is his own narrative in the *Preface to Guide to Thiền Buddhism* (禪宗指南序 *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam Tự*).<sup>167</sup> The narrative provides not only Trần Thái Tông’s syncretic views of religions, but also the engaged ideology of Vietnamese Buddhist tradition in the Trần dynasty. Due to the importance of the *Preface* with regard to these aspects, let us consider the King’s narrative:

I humbly think that the Buddha nature is universal (literally, the Buddha nature is neither Southern nor Northern), so everyone can obtain it by self-cultivation. As regards [human] nature, there are those who are born to be wise and there are those who are born foolish, but all people have shared the same source of awakening. Therefore, Buddhism, the Great Teaching that I have followed, is a means of enticing deluded people, is a shortcut of knowing the way of life-and-death [i.e., the path of liberation]. The essential responsibility of the former sages is regulating [the social] life; they are regarded as model figures for future generations. Consequently, the Sixth Patriarch said: “The former great sages are not different from the great [Chan] masters.” Clearly knowing that the Buddha’s teaching is also supposed to be spread to the world by the former sages. Now, how [is it] not possible for me to take the former sages’ responsibility as my responsibility, to take the Buddha’s teaching as my teaching?

In addition, as a child, I began to have knowledge. Whenever [I] listened to the teachings of Thiền [Chan] masters [I] immediately purified my thoughts, stopped the random mind, [and] deeply felt peaceful. Having deliberately [become interested] in the inner teaching [Buddhism], in the study of Thiền Buddhism, I dedicated myself to looking for a master, being a sincerely faithful admirer of the Way. Even though the wish to return toward [the Way] is sprouting, the vital motivation that pushed me to do so has not been obtained yet.

When [I was] just sixteen years old, the Empress Dowager [my mother] passed away. I was lying on thatch, using the earth as my pillow, sobbing my heart out with bloody eyes, [and] my heart was broken. During this mourning

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<sup>167</sup> The full text of *Guide to Thiền Buddhism* (禪宗指南 *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam*) is claimed to have been lost. But its preface is still extant and serves as a part of the *Essays*’ function as an introduction to the complete works of Trần Thái Tông. In 2009, Dr. Phạm Văn Tuấn of the Sino-Nôm Institute claimed that he had found the *Guide to Thiền Buddhism in Verses* (禪宗指南詞 *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam Ca*). A detailed study of this found text is being conducted and will be published in the near future.

misery, I was in no mood for other matters. Only several years later, the Great Ancestor Emperor [my father] followed my mother and departed this life. The anguish of [my mother's death] had rendered me inconsolable; [then] the great pain of [my father's loss] was even more penetrating. Overwhelmed with sadness, it was difficult to release my mind. I think the parental love of [their] children consists of caring, embracing, feeding, [and] educating that which is unlimited [and] incomparable. [Children], even if they grind their bones into powder [and] break their bodies into pieces still cannot even repay a bit of their parents' love.

Moreover, my deceased father, the founding emperor of the [Trần] dynasty, overcame difficulties/challenges in establishing the foundation of the dynasty. Regulating the state and serving [its] people were especially important [to him]. [Since he] entrusted the great vessel [i.e., the throne] to me during my vigorous youth, [I] have always been haunted by worry; there is no time to be at ease. I told myself: "I have no parents above me to rely on already. I am afraid of not meeting the aspirations of the common people below me. What can I do [then]? I considered and tried to look for [a way] out. Would it be better to retreat [and] dwell in mountains and forests, seeking the Buddhist teachings, to understand the 'great event' [i.e., reason] of life-and-death for repaying the merit of [my] parents' painful task? Such [thinking] is also good, isn't it? Thus, [this is what] I determined to do.

In the fifth year of Thiên Ứng Chính Bình, the year of Bính Thân [1236],<sup>168</sup> on the third night of the fourth month, I got dressed, went to the palace's gate, [and] told the guards that I wanted to go out to secretly listen to the people's words and observe their aspirations, [only then could I] understand their difficulties.

At that time, there were only seven or eight attendants following me. At the time of Pig [9-11pm] at night, I quietly left with a horse, alone. Only when crossing to the river and going towards the east, did I [then] disclose my true intention to the attendants. They were stunned, taken back, [and] all shed tears. At the time of Cat [5-7am] of the following day, [I] arrived at Đại Than ferry port [which was] close to Mount Phả Lại. Afraid that people would recognize me, I covered my face with my sleeve while crossing the river. Then I took a footpath to the mountain. At the time of Monkey [3-5pm] I lodged for a night at Giác Hạnh monastery. Staying [until] daybreak, I continued on. I had to cross rugged mountains, to wade deep springs. Hence, [my] horse was weary [and] refused to move on.

I then left the horse, leaned toward the cliffs, and walked forward. At the time of Sheep [1-3pm], I reached Mount Yên Tử. The next daybreak, I climbed up to the top and paid respect to the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm, the Great Śramaṇa. As he saw me, the National Preceptor was very delighted. He calmly told me that:

'As an old monk, I have dwelled in the rustic mountain for a long time. [My] bones get hardened, my appearance looks gaunt. I have eaten sweet-and-bitten vegetables, chestnuts, and have drunk spring water. My mind is

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<sup>168</sup> The *Toàn Thư* wrote the event took place in 1237. However, the King's narrative in the *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam Tự* said it was in 1236. The *Toàn Thư* recorded it a year later mistakenly.

as a floating cloud following the wind to come here. Now, your Majesty gives up the [supreme] power of a King [leaves the throne], has thoughts of hiding in the wilderness of rustic woods: have you indeed sought something [here]?’

Hearing his words, I burst into tears. Following that, I said:

‘I, at my young age, have experienced the great loss of my parents; isolating above scholars and people, I have had no one to rely on. I again think of the former royal career that is rising and declining constantly [and its unstable vicissitudes]. Hence, going to this mountain, I seek for nothing else but to become a Buddha.’

The National Preceptor replied:

‘There is no Buddha in mountains. The Buddha is in your mind. The tranquil and wise mind is the real Buddha. Now if your Majesty realizes this mind, you become a Buddha on the spot. Thus, you cannot seek a Buddha in the external world.’<sup>169</sup>

Trần Thủ Độ, the court officials, and guards found Trần Thái Tông at Mount Yên Tử and insisted that the King should return to the capital city; otherwise, they would build a new capital in the mountain. At that time, the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm at that time spoke to the young king: “Since you are the King, please take the will of people as your will, take the heart of people as your heart. The whole nation is now asking for your return, how can you refuse? There is, however, one important thing you should never forget when you are back to the imperial palace, i.e., to study the Buddhist scriptures.”<sup>170</sup> Trần Thái Tông then returned to the capital and continued his kingship.

The very first impression of this narrative is that Trần Thái Tông’s attempt at renunciation seemed to follow the story of Shakyamuni Buddha. The historical Buddha was a future king, and he left the royal palace in the middle of the night with his loyal

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<sup>169</sup> *Sơn bốn vô Phật, duy tồn hồ tâm, tâm tịch nhi tri, thị danh chân Phật, kim bệ hạ nhược ngô thứ tâm, tắc lập địa thành Phật, vô nhược ngoại cầu dã.* 山本無佛。惟存乎心。心寂而知。是名真佛。今陛下若悟此心。則立地成佛。無若外求也。 (Essays: 29a).

<sup>170</sup> *Phàm vị nhân quân giả, dĩ thiên hạ chi dục vị dục, dĩ thiên hạ chi tâm vị tâm, kim thiên hạ dục nghênh bệ hạ quy, tắc bệ hạ an đắc bất quy tại? Nhiên nội điển chi cứu nguyên bệ hạ vô vong tư tu nhĩ.* 凡為人君者。以天下之欲為欲。以天下之心為心。今天下欲迎陛下歸。則陛下安得不歸哉。然內典之究願陛下無忘斯須耳。 (Essays: 30a).

servant while the latter had no idea about his true intention. Similarly, Trần Thái Tông was the king of Đại Việt, who left the royal place at night with his loyal guards and none of them had known the King's true intention until he told them to go back so that he could set forth on his journey alone. The Buddha's motivation of renunciation was to find solutions to end sufferings in the circle of life and death. In his own words, Trần Thái Tông explained that his motivation to become a Buddhist monk was to understand the way of ultimate liberation, and to pay gratitude to his parents' kindness.<sup>171</sup> Saying so, Trần Thái Tông wanted to fulfill his responsibilities as a filial son based on Confucian ethics (filial piety: 孝 *hiếu*), and he also wished to discover the metaphysical secret of life and death through the Buddhist teachings.

When we look closely at his explanation, we can see that Trần Thái Tông made it clear that his religious attitude was a syncretism of Buddhist and Confucian teachings. At the beginning of the *Preface*, he identified different roles for the Buddhist and Confucian teachings. Buddhism offered a soteriological means to solving the problem of birth and death and helping all sentient beings (either the wise or the ignorant people) to realize the Buddha nature within themselves. Confucian teachings functioned as an ethical system in which Confucian scholars should be role models for future generations by setting moral norms in the secular world. As a king who was inspired by Buddhist ultimate liberation, Trần Thái Tông erased the gaps between the two religions by saying that the

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<sup>171</sup> ... *bất như thối xứ sơn lâm, bang cầu Phật giáo, dĩ minh sinh tử chi đại sự, hựu dĩ báo cù lao chi đức, bất diệc mỹ tai?*... 不如退處山林。旁求佛教。以明生死之大事。又以報劬勞之德。不亦美哉。(Essays: 28a).

responsibility of former sages was to propagate the Buddha's teachings in the worldly world.<sup>172</sup> Thus, the King embodied both teachings in his religious belief and practice.

To resolve any philosophical or ethical differences and contradictions between Buddhism and Confucianism, Trần Thái Tông applied the Chan Buddhist theory that all sentient beings have shared the same Buddha nature.<sup>173</sup> Since the Buddha nature is universal for all sentient beings, it is not necessary for a person to live a monastic lifestyle in order to attain awakening or Buddhahood. Despite being called to the Buddhist awakening, Trần Thái Tông still identified himself with the kingship, which was very much in line with Confucian ideals. The idea of Buddha nature became a hermeneutical tool that Trần Thái Tông would employ to resolve the tensions between his identity of kingship-Confucianism-and his religious motivations-Buddhism. In such a manner, the King eliminated the distance and discrepancies between the ultimate liberation or the awakening of Buddhism and the ethical norms and responsibilities of the Confucian teachings.

The blending of Confucianism and Buddhism in Trần Thái Tông's religious views found an echo in the advice of the National Preceptor to the King: "There is no Buddha in mountains. The Buddha is in your mind."<sup>174</sup> To be specific, the National Preceptor tried to say that being a king would not an obstacle for Trần Thái Tông to attain awakening. The National Preceptor further convinced the King to continue his kingship

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<sup>172</sup> ... *tắc tri ngã Phật chi giáo, hựu giả tiên thánh dĩ truyền ư thế dã...* 則知我佛之教。又假先聖以傳於世也。 (*Essays*: 27a).

<sup>173</sup> *Phật vô Nam Bắc, quân khả tu cầu, tánh hữu trí ngu đồng tư giác ngộ* 佛無南北。均可修求。性有智愚同資覺悟。 (*Essays*: 26b-27a).

<sup>174</sup> *Sơn bản vô Phật, duy tồn hồ tâm* 山本無佛。惟存乎心。 (*Essays*: 29a).

because he should “take the will of people as his will, take the heart of people as his heart” while he would study the Buddhist scriptures and cultivate the Buddhist practices. The National Preceptor’s advice consists of two sides: one part, that being a king meant to “take the will of people as his will, take the heart of people as his heart,” a Confucian guideline of the kingship; the other part was an encouragement for a Buddhist monk, which was to study Buddhist scriptures and cultivate the practice diligently.

The King further argued that the former sages were not different from great Buddhist monks.<sup>175</sup> His claim covers two dimensions of the religious engagement. As we have discussed above, it is possible to practice Buddhist teachings and attain Buddhahood while one remains a householder. This is how the Buddha’s teachings were passed down to future generations with the help of Confucian scholars on the secular level. Nevertheless, it was also not questioned when the Buddhist monks involved themselves in the political matters of the state. The Buddhist monks in this context were the King’s advisors in both political and religious matters. The National Preceptor Trúc Lâm held such a position in the life of Trần Thái Tông.<sup>176</sup> Therefore, the fact that Trần Thái Tông

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<sup>175</sup> *Tiên đại thánh nhân dĩ đại sư vô biệt* 先大聖人與大師無別。 (*Essays*: 27a).

<sup>176</sup> There was no concrete evidence regarding to the biography of the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm. Regarding the relationship between the King and the National Preceptor, the *Toàn Thư* and the *Việt Sử Tiêu Án* referred to the National Preceptor as an old friend of the King. However, the Buddhist sources possibly considered the National Preceptor as either the King’s master or an old friend of the Trần family. In Trần Thái Tông’s *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam Tụ*, the National Preceptor was called Trúc Lâm the Great Śramaṇa. Trúc Lâm also referred himself an “old monk” (*lão tăng*) in the same text. According to the *Thiền Uyển*, Đạo Viên was the one who prepared the funeral ceremony of Hiện Quang in 1221 when Trần Thái Tông was only three years old. Having taken on such a responsibility, Đạo Viên was likely at least twenty years of age; hence, he should have been born in approximately 1200. Therefore, it was quite impossible that Trúc Lâm was the King’s old friend, but a friend of his family. In the way the King showed his respect to and asked for Trúc Lâm’s advice, he would have been one of the King’s spiritual masters.

After the encounter with Trần Thái Tông in 1236, Trúc Lâm went back to the capital city in 1248. The King invited him to write a preface for his *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam*. Trần Thái Tông elevated him to the title of National Preceptor and asked him to stay at Thắng Nghiêm Temple. These accounts were written in the *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam Tụ* by the King himself. Trúc Lâm would stay at Thắng Nghiêm for a short while in this year before he returned to Mount Yên Tử. Trúc Lâm was once again mentioned in TĐL when Trần Thái Tông was about to pass away in 1277. It said, “Thánh Tông wanted to invite the National Preceptors

had left the royal palace, had gone to Mount Yên Tử to meet the National Preceptor, and presented his earnest intention to become a Buddhist monk was not simply based on religious motivations. That meeting would also present an opportunity for the King to receive a political advice from the National Preceptor as well. In consequence, Trần Thái Tông decided to return to the capital city and continued his kingship while upholding Buddhist practices and composing Buddhist writings.

### 3. Remarks about the King's Attempt at Renunciation

The first undertaking of Trần Thái Tông after returning to the royal palace was to settle the conflicts with Trần Liễu in an amicable way. Despite this being contrary to the intention of Trần Thủ Độ, the King decided to protect and spare Trần Liễu's life after his revolt at the Cái River.<sup>177</sup> In addition, Trần Thái Tông granted the land of Yên Phụ, Yên Dưỡng, Yên Sinh, Yên Hưng and Yên Bang (present day Hải Dương) to Trần Liễu. The latter was satisfied with the settlement of the King and moved on with his life as Yên Sinh Vương.<sup>178</sup> The settlement showed the King's goodwill as well as his effort to make up with Trần Liễu, while not completely upsetting Trần Thủ Độ at the same time by

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Trúc Lâm and Đại Đăng to talk about the supramundane Dharma to Thái Tông," yet the King refused it. Trúc Lâm was possibly in his late seventies or early eighties that year. From the encounter of Trần Thái Tông and Trúc Lâm at Mount Yên Tử in 1236 to 1277, they would have known each other for more than forty years. In short, we would say Trúc Lâm was an old friend of the Trần family and one of the Buddhist masters of Trần Thái Tông. The King considered this relationship a personal one when he chose Trúc Lâm's place as a refuge from his scandalous marriages.

<sup>177</sup> *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 1, 17. It reads, "Two weeks after the King returned to the capital, Liễu estimated his strength. He was helpless and it was impossible to rebel against [the King]. Going in secret, he used a dug-out canoe, pretended to be a fisherman, stepped onto the King's boat, and asked for all to surrender. At that time, the King was inside the boat. They looked at each other and both burst into tears. Thủ Độ heard the news, entered the King's boat, unsheathed a sword then shouted out: 'Kill Liễu, the rebel!' The King hid Liễu inside the boat and told Thủ Độ in haste: 'Phụng Càn Vương (Phụng Càn Vương was the posthumous name of Trần Liễu since the Lý dynasty) came to surrender.' Then [the King] used his body to cover Liễu.

Thủ Độ became irritated, threw the sword into the river and said: 'I am only your hunting dog. How could I know if you were in harmony or hatred with each other?'

The King tried to reconcile Thủ Độ and ordered him to retreat the troops..."

<sup>178</sup> Trần, *Việt Nam Sử Lược*, 126.



accepting Thuận Thiên to be his wife. In other words, Trần Thái Tông was successfully in balancing issues of state and personal issues. For the state, his taking Thuận Thiên—who was pregnant with a prince of the Trần family—to be his wife would guarantee a successor for the dynasty. With respect to his brother Trần Liễu, the King chose to live in concord instead of destroying him for preventing revenges and securing his kingship.

The origin of Trần Thái Tông's problem was the internal marriage that the Trần family had prioritized to maintain the power of the new dynasty. There are three forms of judgement of later writers and historians regarding the King's settlement of the marital conflict with Trần Liễu. One was from royal members of the Trần family. The other two judgements were based on the Buddhist and Confucian perspectives.

In upholding the internal marriage, the royal members of the Trần family seemed to ignore the scandalous marriages of Trần Thái Tông. Trần Hưng Đạo—one of the sons of Trần Liễu—regardless of the conflicts between his father and Trần Thái Tông, still served the Trần kings loyally.<sup>179</sup> The seventh of the Trần kings, Trần Dụ Tông (r.1341-1369), did not hesitate to compare Trần Thái Tông with Emperor Tang Taizong (r. 626-649), the founder of the Chinese Tang dynasty, in a poem:

The founders of both the Tang and Việt are called Taizong/Thái Tông  
Zhenguan was the reign era of the Tang, Nguyên Phong was of the Việt  
Jiancheng was killed while An Sinh was forgiven.

Posthumous names were the same, but their virtues were so different.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Trần Hưng Đạo or Trần Quốc Tuấn (1228-1300) is famous for leading the Trần troops in the wars against the Yuan-Mongol in 1285 and 1287. Because of his great victories over the Yuan-Mongol, Vietnamese people have deified and worshipped him up to the present day.

<sup>180</sup> 唐越開基兩太宗  
唐稱貞觀越元豐  
見成誅死安生在  
廟號雖同德不同

Đường Việt khai cơ lưỡng Thái Tông  
Đường xưng Trinh Quán, Việt Nguyên Phong  
Kiến Thành tru tử, An Sinh tại  
Miếu hiệu tuy đồng, đức bất đồng

The poem of Trần Dụ Tông sprang from an admiration toward Trần Thái Tông due to his benevolent treatment to Trần Liễu. In addition, it was also a way to excuse the incestuous relations of Trần Dụ Tông with Princess Thiên Ninh, his elder sister.<sup>181</sup> If we consider the internal marriage from the moral standpoint of Confucianism or modern ethics, it would be dishonorable. However, the insiders such as Trần Thái Tông, Trần Dụ Tông, or other royal members of the Trần family would have had a different outlook since they founded the Trần dynasty through political marriages. They likely believed the internal marriage would secure the state power in the hand of the Trần family. When unity was the goal, personal interests should be sublimated for the sake of the family and the state. With this outlook, the scandalous marriages of Trần Thái Tông would be a minor problem of the Trần family in comparison to remaining peace and power of the Trần dynasty.

The internal marriage did flout the ethical values of Confucianism, especially the teachings of *Three Moral Bonds and Five Cardinal Virtues* (三綱五常 *Tam cương ngũ thường*) as recorded in the *Toàn Thư* and the *Việt Sử Tiêu Án*. A side note here is that Confucian historians, including Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, and Ngô Thì Sĩ tried to “Confucianize” or represent the Trần dynasty as a centralized state according to the framework of the Chinese state model, which was based on Confucian teachings.<sup>182</sup> This is likely far from the form of Confucianism that had existed during the Trần dynasty. In

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<sup>181</sup> Like other Trần kings, Trần Dụ Tông was consanguineously married to his cousin's sister. Additionally, he had a sexual affair with his elder sister, Princess Thiên Ninh. The incest would make Confucian historians disregard his words and would consider his admiration toward Trần Thái Tông as an excuse for his ethical defect.

<sup>182</sup> Phan Phu Tiên (1307-1482) was a Confucian scholar and historian under the reign of Lê Nhân Tông (r. 1443-1459). He was the author of the *Đại Việt Sử Ký Tục Biên*, an important source for the later compilation of the *Toàn Thư* of Ngô Sĩ Liên (b. 1400) later. Both the *Đại Việt Sử Ký Tục Biên* and the *Toàn Thư* were completed during the Lê dynasty when the Confucian teachings became more influential in the royal court. Ngô Thì Sĩ (1726-1780) was the author of the *Việt Sử Tiêu Án*, a historical record of Vietnam from the beginning period to the time Vietnam was under the Chinese Ming domination.

these records the Confucian historians and literati tended to focus on Trần Thái Tông's scandalous marriages rather than on his contributions to the state.

Generally, historian Phan Phu Tiên leveled a high degree of criticism against royal members of the Trần family that was initiated by Trần Thủ Độ because of their scandalous marriages. According to Phan Phu Tiên, Trần Thái Tông was not a benevolent king because he failed to set up rules and regulations (the *Three Moral Bonds and Five Cardinal Virtues*), nor did he transmit them to the later generations. Neither did the act of sparing Trần Liễu's life generate from the King's benevolence because he himself was responsible for Trần Liễu's revolt. That was just how the Law of Heaven worked. Therefore, Phan Phu Tiên would see Trần Thái Tông as a bad example because of the incest of Trần Dụ Tông in the later years.<sup>183</sup> Other Confucian historians and scholars such as Ngô Sĩ Liên<sup>184</sup> and Ngô Thì Sĩ<sup>185</sup> had a more neutral voice on Trần Thái Tông. They both agreed that his marriages were dishonorable, yet they accepted the liberal and generous personality of the King.

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<sup>183</sup> The *Three Moral Bonds and Five Cardinal Virtues* were essential ethical principles of humanity. Trần Thái Tông was the founding king, [so he] ought to have set up rules and regulations and transmitted them to later generations. Nevertheless, [he] followed the nefarious plot of Thủ Độ which involved abducting his brother's wife to become his queen. Was that morality neglected, thus opening the door to incest? That Liễu was blazing with hatred and would have had the audacity to rebel was because Thái Tông had given him opportunity to commit crime. As it has been said, Thái Tông was benevolent for not having committed fratricide. I, however, believed that abducting the wife of [his] brother was obviously a crime, and he did not spare his brother's life because the Law of Heaven prevailed. How could it have been a benevolent [deed]? It is possible to see that Trần Dụ Tông later engaged in incest and sexual assault because he was likely imitating Thái Tông. See *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 17-18.

<sup>184</sup> Ngô Sĩ Liên writes in the *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 7: "The King was liberal and generous, had manners of a great king who established the new dynasty, then handed it down, settled the laws to maintain the socio-political order. He thus built up the great dynasty of the Trần. However, Thủ Độ was the one who really took care of the kingdom's affairs, and his married life was dishonored."

<sup>185</sup> Ngô Thì Sĩ remarks: "The King was a tolerant and generous person. He had the manners of a great king who founded the new dynasty, wrote valuable literary works. The topsy-turvy of the Three Moral Bonds and Five Cardinal Virtues was the unwholesome deed he exclusively committed." See Ngô, *Việt Sử Tiêu Án*, 68.

As mentioned earlier, Trần Thái Tông believed that Confucian scholars should spread the Buddha's teachings in the secular world. By the end of the *Preface to Guide to Thiền Buddhism*, Trần Thái Tông also wrote that one of the purposes for which he composed this text was to “build a wish to continue and expand the works of great former Confucian sages.”<sup>186</sup> Although the blending of Confucianism and Buddhism was undeniable in writings of Trần Thái Tông, I have not encountered any discussion of the teachings in *Three Moral Bonds and Five Cardinal Virtues* in the King's *Essays*. In addition, the Trần kings still relied more on Buddhism than on Confucian literati in for getting advice on how to rule the state. The encounter of Trần Thái Tông with the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm was an example. The critiques by later Confucian historians of the scandalous marriages of Trần Thái Tông were only an effort to “Confucianize” the political and ethical system of the Trần dynasty.

In discussing the attempt at renunciation by Trần Thái Tông, the Vietnamese Buddhist scholars have emphasized the King's dedication to Buddhism and his benevolent treatment toward Trần Liễu over his moral judgment regarding his marital matters. An interesting coincidence is that both Prince Siddhartha and Trần Thái Tông married their cousin sisters even though they were from different times and cultures. This coincidence is also one of the reasons that Vietnamese Buddhists seemed to ignore the ethical issues regarding the internal marriages of Trần Thái Tông with Chiêu Thánh and Thuận Thiên.

The narratives of Trần Thái Tông and later Buddhist texts tried to portray the King himself as someone who had special spiritual potential, which made his profile

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<sup>186</sup> *Cái dục kế tiên đại thánh nhân chi công, nhi quảng chi dã*. 蓋欲繼先大聖人之功而廣之也。 (*Essays*: 30b).

more respectable among Vietnamese Buddhists. The attempt of renunciation of Trần Thái Tông itself was an imitation of the Great Renunciation of the Shakyamuni Buddha. In the narrative, the King described his keen inclination toward Buddhist teachings in an impressive way. He wrote: “As a child, I began to have knowledge whenever [I] listened to the teachings of Thiền [Chan] masters. [I] immediately purified my thoughts, stopped the random mind, [and] deeply felt peaceful.”<sup>187</sup> In this description, Trần Thái Tông represented himself as a special person who was gifted in religious understanding, and as someone who was dedicated to meditation practice and experienced the essential meaning of Thiền Buddhism.

Similarly, the TĐL also made a connection between Trần Thái Tông and the Sixth Chinese Chan Patriarch Huineng. For example, it said that the King was interested in the *Diamond Sūtra* and one day when he read to the phrase “to give rise to the pure mind which abides nowhere” (應無所住而生其心 *ung vô sở trụ nhi sanh kỳ tâm*), the King suddenly obtained the great awakening. This description of how Trần Thái Tông attained enlightenment is the same as that in as described in the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*.<sup>188</sup> This implication is that Trần Thái Tông obtained the meaning of Thiền in the same way as did the Sixth Patriarch. The spiritual similarities with both the Buddha

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<sup>187</sup> *Thả Trẫm ư hài đồng hữu thức chi niên, sao văn thiền sư chi huấn, tắc tròng tư tức lự, khái nhiên thanh tịnh.* 且朕於孩童有識之年。秒聞禪師之訓。則澄思息慮凜然青淨。 (*Essays*: 27a).

<sup>188</sup> The TĐL (p.8a8-b2) provides a summary of the attempt of renunciation based on the narrative of Trần Thái Tông himself. It reads: “In the fourth month of the year of Bính Thân, the fifth year of Thiên Ứng Chính Bình era (1236), [the King] had left the capital city at midnight, crossed the river, travelled to the East, arrived directly at Hoa Yên Temple at Mount Trúc Lâm directly. He visited and discussed [the Dharma] with the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm Viên Chứng [at the temple] for which he was inspired and dedicated to studying Thiền Buddhism. Whenever he was free from the political and national affairs, he would gather Buddhist practitioners and masters to discuss and debate Buddhist teachings. The King often read the *Diamond Sūtra*. One time, when reading the phrase “to give rise to the pure mind which abides nowhere,” he stopped reading and contemplated that phrase. Suddenly, he obtained the great awakening and he started to write the *Guide to Thiền Buddhism in Verses* (*Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam Ca*).

and the Sixth Patriarch Huineng elevate the King as a symbol of Vietnamese Buddhism. These connections present the continuity and orthodoxy of the Buddhist tradition in Vietnam.

#### **4. Summary**

The attempt of renunciation represented a maturation in both the political and religious life of Trần Thái Tông. During the first ten years of his kingship, Trần Thái Tông witnessed the dynasty changing, his father-in-law was driven to suicide, his wife's family destroyed. In addition, he himself had to abandon his wife who entrusted the throne to him and had to acknowledge all sorts of difficulties that the Trần dynasty was facing. On a psychological level, Trần Thái Tông understood that he must yield his personal life for the sake of the Trần dynasty; yet he found that this was so unbearable that he decided to leave the royal palace for Mount Yên Tử in 1236.

Looking at this event from a political perspective, it could have been considered a desertion or a rebellious act by a young king. As a consequence, Trần Thủ Độ began listening to him and ceasing his involvement into the King's personal matters. As a result, Trần Thái Tông succeeded in settling his conflicts with Trần Liễu while satisfying the will of Trần Thủ Độ by marrying to Thuận Thiên. This consequence may not have been the best solution, yet Trần Thủ Độ did start to recognize the King's leadership. In addition, the King learned from the National Preceptor that he should take the will of his people as his will and take the aspirations of his people as his aspirations. This political awareness first helped Trần Thái Tông to face his personal problems bravely. It also played an important role in the evolving leadership of Trần Thái Tông later on during the

Mongol-Đại Việt war in 1257, an event that helped the Trần dynasty to remain peaceful and independent.

The encounter with the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm broadened Trần Thái Tông's horizons especially with respect to the understanding of Buddhist devotion and awakening. By telling him that “There is no Buddha in mountains. The Buddha is in your mind” and to “take the will of people as your will, take the hearts of people as your heart,” the National Preceptor convinced Trần Thái Tông to return to his kingship while remaining dedicated to Buddhist practice so that he would realize his true mind. Furthermore, the National Preceptor reminded the King of the importance of reading and studying Buddhist scriptures. Taking these pieces of advice seriously, Trần Thái Tông even composed Buddhist writings alongside other forms of cultivation including repentance, Thiền, and Pure Land practices.

### **III. The First Attempted Mongol Invasion (1257-1258)**

The section aims to examine the leadership of Trần Thái Tông during the first attempted Mongol invasion in 1257. His leadership was grounded in the political awareness that Trần Thái Tông had learned from the National Preceptor, as mentioned in the previous section, specifically, “to take the will of people as your will, to take the heart of people as your heart.” Although the Mongol-Đại Việt war took place within the span of a year, Trần Thái Tông and the Trần court had been preparing for decades as the Mongol Empire was growing and conquering China. To highlight the political achievement of Trần Thái Tông, this section deals with roles of the King in preparing for the war, leading the defense, and driving back the attacks of the Mongols. In doing so, the

section will examine both Vietnamese and Chinese historical records for a thorough understanding of the first Mongol-Đại Việt war in 1257-1258.

### **1. The Trần Dynasty and the Mongol Empire**

Historically, the establishment of the Trần dynasty and the expansion of the Mongol Empire took place almost at the same time. In 1206, Genghis Khan had unified the nomadic tribes of Mongolia and established the Mongol Empire, which directed its invasion attempts in every direction across Eurasia. Genghis Khan passed away in 1227 during a military campaign against the Western Xia. After Genghis Khan's death, the Mongol Empire was divided into four parts, each placed under the control of one of his four sons. Trần Thái Tông enthroned in 1225, marking the establishment of the Trần dynasty. This event had taken place just two years before the death of Genghis Khan. The growth of both the Trần dynasty and the Mongol Empire thus took place concurrently.

Before the Mongol-Đại Việt war in 1257, the Mongols continued to expand their influences and eventually conquered China. After the death of Genghis Khan, Ögeidei, the third son of Genghis Khan, extended the Mongol power over China, and successfully conquered the Jin dynasty in 1234 by collaborating with the Southern Song. However, the alliance of the Mongols and the Southern Song did not last long after the fall of the Jin dynasty. Both sides wanted to defeat each other and unify the entire Chinese mainland; hence, their co-existence carried the risk of further war. The Mongols resumed their advance after Möngke obtained the title of Great Khan in 1251 and ordered Kublai, his younger brother, to capture Yunnan in 1252. By the end of 1256, Kublai completed his mission of conquering Yunnan. Kublai then left for the north to join Möngke's army and ordered his right-hand general Uriangkhadaï to take charge of Yunnan.



Đại Việt shared the same risk of being invaded once the Mongol troops expanded Southward, especially after the Mongol Empire came to control Yunnan at the northern border of Đại Việt. Trần Thủ Độ was long aware of the potential of this threat and he tried to push Trần Thái Tông to have a legitimate successor. This led to the King's attempt at renunciation in 1236. The National Preceptor Trúc Lâm would learn of this circumstance and thus told the King to return to his kingship and to follow the will and the wishes of his people. Keeping the advice of the National Preceptor in mind, Trần Thái Tông became an outstanding ruler upon his return to the royal palace. The King worked closely with the Trần court in building up the country and preparing for the inevitable war with the Mongols. The victory of Đại Việt in the war with the Mongols was the foremost achievement in Trần Thái Tông's political career.

## 2. Prior to the War

The *Toàn Thư* records several decisions Trần Thái Tông made prior to the war with the Mongols that reveal his sharp observation and timely preparation. Firstly, Trần Thái Tông tried to ensure that Đại Việt was a law-abiding society. In 1230, the King ordered the composition and promulgation of the *Dynasty's Law Codes* (國朝通制 *Quốc Triều Thông Chế*) in twenty fascicles after reviewing the law codes from previous dynasties. Secondly, he focused on fortifying agricultural development by issuing decrees to dredge the rivers and build dams the in 1231, 1248, and 1255 respectively, for flood control, harvest reassurance and military tactics later used in those rivers.

Thirdly, Trần Thái Tông conducted military operations so that the state's borders were secured. For instance, in 1239, healthy people who were fit to be soldiers were called to join the Trần army, which was divided into three ranks: upper, medium, and

lower. Building a strong army was always a priority for the Trần court, so that they could respond promptly to threats from neighboring countries.<sup>189</sup> Fourthly, the King resolved the problem of robbery at the border between Đại Việt and the Southern Song.<sup>190</sup> Trần Thái Tông also risked the crossing of the Southern Song's border himself in order to visit several prefectures in the neighboring country.<sup>191</sup> Through this visit, Trần Thái Tông was able to observe the socio-political circumstances and administrative organization, and was able to ascertain the weaponry potentials of the Southern Song by appropriating some iron anchors and one of their firearms. Having studied the administrative organization of the Southern Song, Trần Thái Tông then carried out a reshuffling of Đại Việt's administration upon his returned during the second month of 1242. He divided the country into twelve counties or prefectures (phủ/lộ) and each of them was divided into a number of communes (xã) and hamlets (sách). A census was also conducted in the same year so that the government could collect taxes more accurately, according to the number of laborers and the size of the land or field that a family had. Tax exemption was applied

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<sup>189</sup> In 1243, the King requested his subjects to complete the census book and selected more men for the ground forces. Moreover, the healthy and strong men from all prefectures were selected to join the armed forces of Tứ Thiên, Tứ Thánh, Tứ Thần, Thiên Thuộc, Thiên Cương, Chương Thánh, Cung Thần, Thánh Dục, Thần Sách, Cẩm Vệ (Imperial Guards), and Trạo Nhi or Phong Đội. All civil and military mandarins had to pass an approved review of their positions in the third month of 1246. This review was conducted once every fifteen years, at which time a mandarin could be promoted to one rank higher. In addition, the mandarin would get a new level of promotion after every ten years of his having been made official.

<sup>190</sup> In 1240, after knowing that the Northern bandits entered illegally and caused troubles at the Đại Việt's border, Trần Thái Tông sent Bùi Khâm to investigate the situation. One year later, the Man people from the North again caused disturbance at the border, Phạm Kính Ân was ordered to pacify them. By the winter of 1241, the King led the cavalry to attack the Vĩnh An and Vĩnh Bình stations of the Southern Song. See *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 18-19.

<sup>191</sup> He travelled by both land and river routes. When the Northerners then figured out that he was the Đại Việt king, they tried to block the river by iron wires. Trần Thái Tông decided to return home and appropriated several dozens of their iron anchors. See *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 19. To travel in disguise meant that the King took the risk of losing his life at any time on the land of the Southern Song. For this reason, historian Ngô Thì Sĩ in *Việt Sử Tiêu Án* condemned and criticized the King's trip. See Ngô, *Việt Sử Tiêu Án*, 71.

for those who did not have any fields or land. During the seventh month of 1242, due to the excessive rain, the taxes were reduced by half for all citizens.<sup>192</sup>

Lastly, Trần Thái Tông ordered that a national examination on the Three Teachings be organized once in every seven years for the purpose of identifying and selecting talented officials. The educational system of Đại Việt was thus regulated by means of this decision of the King. This effort helped to enhance the whole apparatus of government. The *Toàn Thư* said, “In the sixteenth year of Thiên Ứng Chính Bình (1247), in spring, on the second month, opened an exam to select talented people. Nguyễn Hiền was selected as the first doctoral candidate (*trạng nguyên*), Lê Văn Hưu<sup>193</sup> was the second (*bảng nhãn*) and Đặng Ma La was the third one (*thám hoa*). There were 48 candidates was chosen as graduate students (*thái học sinh*) in different ranks.”<sup>194</sup> Following this, a national examination on the Three Teachings was held on the eighth month of 1247. Trần Thái Tông founded the National Teaching Institute (Viện Quốc Học) for gathering the righteous scholars on the sixth month of 1253. He also gave commissioned the carving of statues of Duke of Zhou, Confucius, and Mengzi as well as painting the seventy-two Confucian sages to whom all literati paid respect. The *Four Books* and *Six Classics*<sup>195</sup> were taught at the National Teaching Institute on the ninth

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<sup>192</sup> *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 20.

<sup>193</sup> Lê Văn Hưu was chosen to compose *Đại Việt Sử Ký*, the first historical record of Đại Việt. Unfortunately, the text was lost. The *Toàn Thư* was the later form of *Đại Việt Sử Ký* in which the former one was believed to be incorporated by Ngô Sĩ Liên.

<sup>194</sup> *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 22. Later at the national exam in 1256, Trần Thái Tông granted the titles of *Kinh Trạng Nguyên* and *Trại Trạng Nguyên*. The former referred to the first doctoral candidate chosen in the capital city, and the latter was the first doctoral candidate of the other provinces such as Thanh Hóa and Nghệ An. See *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 28.

<sup>195</sup> The *Four Books* (*Tứ Thư*) and the *Six Classics* (*Lục Kinh*) are main resources of Confucian teachings. The *Four Books* are of *Great Learning*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, *Analects* and *Mencius*. The *Six Classics* consists of *Classic of Poetry*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Rites*, *Book of Music*, *Book of Changes*,

month of 1253,<sup>196</sup> which showed that the King was paying more attention to spreading the Confucian ideas in the service of regulating the socio-political order. In the eighth month of 1253, Trần Thái Tông founded the School of Martial Arts (Giảng Võ Đường) for selecting the generals and for training and recruiting soldiers. During the Trần dynasty, if one decided to follow the military path, he should abstain from getting a training in the National Teaching Institute because it would make him unfocused.<sup>197</sup> Thus, by attending to education, Trần Thái Tông was able to build up a substantial reserve of human capital for Đại Việt that would help him to rule the country whether in time of peace or crisis.

Briefly, Trần Thái Tông was well aware that the arising of the Mongol Empire would become a threat for the independence of Đại Việt. The King took initiative in boosting national strength by amending laws, supporting the domestic agriculture, building up the army, and transforming the administrative and educational systems. With respect to foreign affairs, Trần Thái Tông prioritized security in bordering regions, pacified robberies, and was always alert to the political changes of the Southern Song as they dealt with the growth of the Mongol Empire. Even if we found Trần Thái Tông somewhat adrift in his political career when he attempted the renunciation in 1236, the encounter with the National Preceptor prompted a great change in his approach to the

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*Spring and Autumn Annals*. The *Book of Music* was completely lost during the “burning of books” event in the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE); therefore, the *Six Classics* were reduced into the *Five Classics* (*Ngũ Kinh*). For the dates, authorship and brief contents of the *Four Books* and the *Six Classics*, see more Yao, *Introduction to Confucianism*, 54-67.

<sup>196</sup> *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 26.

<sup>197</sup> Commenting on Trần Thái Tông’s efforts to select talented civil and military mandarins, Ngô Thì Sĩ wrote: “The King ordered the building of the National Teaching Institute, showing his respect, and valuing the literary career. The School of Martial Arts was established. Both literary career and martial arts seemed to blossom fruitfully. Therefore, there were the respectively appearances of Hán Siêu, Trung Ngạn, Nhật Duật, Ngũ Lão. Văn Trinh and Hưng Đạo, who were famous generals/commanders at that time. This was because he respected and valued both the pen and the sword. Ngô, *Việt Sử Tiêu Án*, 72. Cf. Nguyễn, *Thiền học*, 37.

kingship. Trần Thái Tông became more engaged in ruling the state, even when he was occasionally involved in dangerous missions such as solo travel to the Southern Song to gather intelligence prior to the Mongol war in 1257.

### 3. Trần Thái Tông in the Mongol-Đại Việt War

Both Chinese and Vietnamese historical sources record the Mongol-Đại Việt war in detail. The *Yuanshi* said that General Uriangkhadaï sent three letters to Trần Thái Tông and requested the King to open the passage so that they could encircle the Southern Song's forces in 1257.<sup>198</sup> This “borrowing a passage” was a pretext, as it was obvious that Đại Việt would become the next target after the Mongols conquered the Southern Song. Understanding their situation, the Trần court had no choice but to get ready for war.<sup>199</sup>

Trần Thái Tông played a dominant role throughout the war with the Mongols. At first, the King commanded the imprisonment of the Mongol envoys in order to challenge the enemy. Following this, he issued an edict sending the cavalry and navy forces to Yunnan border under the supervision of General-in-Chief Trần Quốc Tuấn. During the eleventh month of 1257, the King ordered the whole population to manufacture and repair weapons to get ready for the war with the Mongols.<sup>200</sup> Within a month, the Mongols marched in Đại Việt, thus marking start of the war between the two states.

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<sup>198</sup> Chapter 121: “Biography of Uriangkhadaï” in Song Lian 宋濂, *Yuanshi* 元史, 808.

<sup>199</sup> According to the *Toàn Thư*, the first Mongol envoy was seen in Đại Việt in the eighth month of 1257 by Hà Khuất, the landowner of Quy Hóa (present day Yên Bái and some districts of Phú Thọ). The other two envoys were sent in the following months, and all of them were imprisoned by the Trần court in Thăng Long. The act of sending the Mongol envoys to Đại Việt was not to seek an agreement, but rather, as intelligence-gathering. Hence, Trần Thái Tông imprisoned all of them in order to prevent their communication with the Mongols. This indicates that Trần Thái Tông and the Trần court were prepared for a clash with the Mongols in the near future.

<sup>200</sup> *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 29.

The *Yuanshi* also described the leadership of Trần Thái Tông towards the beginning of the war. In the chapter on the biography of Uriangkhadai, Trần Thái Tông was said to have led a great number of war elephants, the calvary, and the infantry alongside the river.<sup>201</sup> The first clash between the two armies took place at Bình Lệ Nguyên.<sup>202</sup> Regarding the tactics of the Mongols, according to the *Yuanshi*, Uriangkhadai sent two groups of 1,000 soldiers to attack Đại Việt along the Red River.<sup>203</sup> The Mongol armed forces were divided into three armies: the shock troops were led by Trechecdu and followed the lower course of the river; the main forces aimed directly to the capital city Thăng Long and were led by Uriangkhadai; and the rearguards were led by Quaidu and Aju, the Mongol general's son. They planned to make a pincer movement toward Thăng Long, the capital of Đại Việt. Trechecdu was ordered to lure the Đại Việt forces while

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<sup>201</sup> Song Lian 宋濂, *Yuanshi* 元史, 808.

<sup>202</sup> The *Toàn Thư* records the first clash of the two armies at Bình Lệ Nguyên while the *An Nam Chí Lược* says that it was at Nỗ Nguyên. Lê Mạnh Thát and previous historians identify either Nỗ Nguyên or Bình Lệ Nguyên were closed by an effluent of the Red River, probably located at present day Vĩnh Yên. See Lê, *Trần Thái Tông*, 87-89. Cf note of *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 29.

The Mongols were not familiar with the climate and warfare methods of the Vietnamese. At this stage, the war elephants left the Mongols quite surprised. The jungles and rivers were also obstacles for the Mongols for they were practiced in fighting with horses and arrows. Because they were wary of the war elephants, the Mongols decided to shoot burning arrows into their feet and eyes. In terror, the elephants fled in disorder and crushed many Đại Việt soldiers. The Mongols started to gain control in the first battle at Bình Lệ Nguyên. By crossing the river, the Mongols continued to have upper hand in the second battle at Phù Lỗ bridge on the following day.

The *Yuanshi* and the *An Nam Chí Lược* noted that the Mongols moved along the river and shot the arrows into the air in order to test the depth of water. The arrows shrank, showing that the river was shallow, and shafts were found to protrude above the water. The Trần used a similar strategy in the Bạch Đằng war of Ngô Quyền in 938, yet the Mongols seemed not to fall into the same trap. The Mongol cavalry was divided into two troops along the shallows and chased after the Trần army. Nevertheless, the Mongols could not follow the Trần army on water which led their enemy to withdraw by boat.

Another fierce battle between the two armies took place on the next day near Phù Lỗ bridge. Using the same trick, the King ordered his army to cut off the bridge and the Trần army marched to Đông Bộ Đầu, the east gate of capital Thăng Long, toward the South bank of Thiên Mạc River. A secret meeting occurred among the King and some Vietnamese generals to find a way to advance against the enemy. The Trần court left the capital city Thăng Long that very night because they would have been executed by the Mongols if they were captured or defeated.

<sup>203</sup> It was called the Thao River in the Chinese or pro-Mongol historical records like the *Yuanshi* and the *An Nam Chí Lược*, yet it was the Red River (Sông Hồng) in the *Toàn Thư*.

Quaidu would attack them from behind, and then the shock troops would seize their boats so that the Đại Việt would be trapped and taken alive. However, Trechecdu underestimated the Đại Việt forces and failed to follow the order and the Đại Việt forces took the opportunity to counter. While the Mongols followed the fast-paced tactics, the Trần troops took advantage of the climate and terrain of Thăng Long, blocked the chains of foods and supplies to the Mongols, and made surprised attacks on their enemy.

To clinch the final victory of the Trần troops in this first attempted invasion, Trần Thái Tông made two important decisions. The first decision was to evacuate the Vietnamese and trap the Mongols in the capital city Thăng Long after the Trần troops showed signs of weakness following the battles in Bình Lệ Nguyên and Phù Lỗ Bridge. The second decision was to initiate a battle at Đông Bộ Đầu in order to end the war with the Mongols, in the midst of fear and doubt among the Trần court. While the evacuation of Thăng Long helped Đại Việt overturn their situation, the direct fight at Đông Bộ Đầu marked the end of this war: both events led the Trần dynasty to succeed in repelling the Mongol invaders.

The evacuation strategy was well-timed and not only saved many Vietnamese lives but also prevented a possible fall of the Trần troops at Thăng Long. The crucial tactic was postponing a direct fight with the Mongols when the Trần troops were in disadvantageous position. Being unfamiliar with Đại Việt's climate and the terrain of the capital city, Thăng Long,<sup>204</sup> the Mongols faced tremendous difficulties when their food supply routes were blocked from all directions. Although the evacuation occurred in a

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<sup>204</sup> The imperial citadel Thăng Long was small structure in which the royal family and imperial guards resided while the princes and mandarins had their granted lands and lived outside of the imperial citadel. Morris Rossabi points out that the heat, moisture, and mosquitoes challenged the Mongols during the time they were trapped in Thăng Long. See Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*, 78.

rush, the Trần court dared to provoke indignation among the Mongols by letting them find their envoys' death in prison when they captured Thăng Long.<sup>205</sup> This action demonstrated the uncompromising spirit of the Trần dynasty's leaders and its people before a strong force like the Mongol army. Trần Thái Tông and the Trần court had taken advantage of the weather of Đại Việt to fight against the fast-paced strategy of the Mongols.

Throughout the war with the Mongols, Trần Thái Tông presented himself as a proactive leader, yet he was humble enough to consult his subjects for the final victory of his troops. This quality curbed any authoritarian tendencies of the King. This quality also echoed the advice of the National Preceptor to Trần Thái Tông during their encounter in 1236; i.e., "to take the will of people as your will, and to take the heart of people as your heart." It is evident that the King had learned and applied the advice well during the war with the Mongols. Above all, Trần Thái Tông was aligned with the wish of all Vietnamese people, which was to repel the Mongol invaders and protect the independence of Đại Việt. Based on this intention, the King would consider battle plans that were serving the fight such as those of Lê Tần and Trần Thủ Độ. Trần Thái Tông also tried his best to unify all forces and not cooperate with the Southern Song, although

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<sup>205</sup> The Vietnamese historical annals said that Vietnamese people in Thăng Long could not take their weapons while the evacuation order was in place. It seems that the historians tried to make the account looked good for the sake of the Trần court. I would argue that the evacuation was rushed, and the King assumed the role as its initiator in order to make it happen. "Chapter of Annam" in *Yuanshi* (Chapter 209) records that Uriangkhaidai ordered the destruction of much of the capital city of Đại Việt. This record is consistent with the *An Nam Chí Lược* and the Vietnamese annals. However, in the *Biography of Uriangkhaidai* in *Yuanshi*, it says that Uriangkhaidai did not violate the people. This account was contradictory with the record of the *Chapter of Annam* in the same text which insistently highlighted only Uriangkhaidai's dignity.



there was some division, doubt, and fear among the Trần army when they faced a strong army like the Mongols.<sup>206</sup>

In short, it is no doubt that the victory of Đại Việt in the first attempted Mongol invasion was a significant achievement for the Trần dynasty. Trần Thái Tông played an important role in both preparing for the war and directly leading the Trần troops. His leadership through the war showed a maturity in his kingship. Even if the King had shown some reticence when he decided to leave state affairs and flee to Mount Yên Tử in 1236, he became much more responsible for the destiny of the country after the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm had told him how to be a good king and a devout Buddhist at the same time. By keeping the advice of the National Preceptor in mind, Trần Thái Tông always put the national interest above his personal one. The leadership of Trần Thái Tông ascended to a new level when he decided to abdicate the throne two months after the

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<sup>206</sup> Typically, this was the case of Trần Nhật Hiệu, a high-ranking official of the Trần court, who was also a royal member of the royal Trần family. The *Toàn Thư* says that after leaving the capital city Thăng Long, Trần Thái Tông sailed a small boat to the boat of Trần Nhật Hiệu and asked for help because Trần Nhật Hiệu led the Tinh Cương, one of the elite troops of the Trần court. Yet Trần Nhật Hiệu refused to send the Tinh Cương troops to join the King's army and suggested Trần Thái Tông was in alliance with the Southern Song. This was not only a sign of a division within the Trần court but also showed the fear of some of the Vietnamese soldiers toward the Mongols. There were people and soldiers who wanted either to surrender the Mongols or to plead for refuge with the Southern Song like Trần Nhật Hiệu.

The King was not satisfied with Trần Nhật Hiệu's plan, and he immediately left for Regent Trần Thủ Độ's boat. With a strong determination, Trần Thủ Độ told the King: "As long as my head has not fallen to the ground yet, Your Majesty, please do not worry about anything else." Trần Thái Tông was reassured and took his advice. Together with Lê Tần and Trần Thủ Độ, the King drove back the enemy at Đông Bộ Đầu. The *Toàn Thư* records: "On the 24th [of the first month of 1258], the King and Crown Prince were the on royal boat, leading the army to Đông Bộ Đầu, marching the enemy's army and enjoying great victory. As soon as the Mongols were defeated at Đông Bộ Đầu, Trần Thái Tông led the Đại Việt army back to capital city Thăng Long." See *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 30.

The last episode of the Mongol-Đại Việt War was the battle at Đông Bộ Đầu led by the King, which caused the Mongols to flee to the North and suffer yet another ambush led by the mountain leader Hà Bổng of Quy Hóa Camp. Quy Hóa Camp of the Trần period included Yên Bái, the right bank of Red River and some districts of Phú Thọ Province such as present day Sông Thao, Yên Lập and Thanh Hóa. The *Toàn Thư* says that the Man people, Daili people from Yunnan, also joined the troops of Hà Bổng to take revenge on Mongols after the fall of Daili Kingdom of Yunnan in 1253. The Mongols were weak at that time and unable to either resist or kill along the way back to Yunnan for which the Vietnamese annals ironically called them "the Buddhist enemies." See *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 30.

Mongol–Đại Việt war in 1258. His abdication began a new tradition of transferring the political power among the Trần kings.

#### IV. His Abdication (1258)

The abdication of Trần Thái Tông served three purposes. Firstly, it stopped the princes from fighting for state power when the senior emperor was still healthy and involved in state affairs.<sup>207</sup> The successor king was obviously under the support and observation of the senior emperor. This tradition helped to consolidate the Trần court and prevent any seed of revolt within the Đại Việt kingdom. Secondly, as the senior emperor, Trần Thái Tông actively trained his successor in both domestic and foreign affairs within the constraints of a three-way shuttle diplomacy between Đại Việt, the Southern Song, and the Mongols. Regarding foreign affairs, Trần Thái Tông and his successor established the attitude of both appeasement and challenge in diplomatic relations with both the Southern Song and the Mongol Empire. The flexibility in diplomatic relations served the purpose of preserving Đại Việt's independence and territorial integrity. Thirdly, the abdication also gave Trần Thái Tông more time to dedicate to his spiritual practices once his successor was ready for taking care of the affairs of state on his own. For instance, he composed Buddhist writings as collected in the *Essays*. In other words, we would say the decision of stepping down from the throne presented a fusion of Trần Thái Tông's political and religious being. Despite holding supreme power, Trần Thái Tông seemed not to be overly attached to it. Instead, he was willing to hand down his status in a proper arrangement so that the transition of power could be smooth and so that

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<sup>207</sup> Historian Ngô Sĩ Liên said that even though the kingship had changed, the real power was still in the hands of the senior emperor while his successor was not different from the crown prince. In this case, the senior emperor still ruled the country and his successor served as an apprentice emperor while sitting on the throne. See *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 31.

his responsibility as a king could be fulfilled. The attitude of non-attachment to the secular affairs like political power is necessary for a religious seeker.

### 1. Three-way Shuttle Diplomacy

Although Đại Việt won over the Mongols in their first attempt of invasion in 1257-1258, the Trần court decided to maintain a diplomacy of appeasement to both the Southern Song and the Mongols in accordance with Chinese tributary system. The Vietnamese view was that no matter who won at the end and unified China, the Vietnamese should keep their land and receive fair treatment. Such an attitude upset both the Southern Song and the Mongols on occasion. However, Đại Việt under the reign of Trần Thái Tông and his successor was successful in maintaining stable relations with those two Chinese dynasties until the time when the Mongols conquered China and established the Chinese Yuan dynasty in 1279.

According to the Chinese tributary system, Đại Việt as a vassal state was to submit to the Chinese imperial dynasties; the subordinate kings should prostrate themselves to the Chinese emperors and present tribute to them periodically.<sup>208</sup> Once the Mongols conquered China, this tributary system was also automatically applied to Đại Việt. In accordance with this system, the Đại Việt would let the Chinese imperial dynasties know if their new kings had been enthroned and would request recognition by the Chinese. After that, the Đại Việt kings would receive the title of *King of Annam* (*An Nam Quốc Vương*) by the Chinese emperors.<sup>209</sup> The extent to which the Vietnamese

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<sup>208</sup> For further reference on the Chinese tribute system, see Rossabi, *China Among Equals*, 1-4.

<sup>209</sup> Vietnamese historical annals did not record the conferring of the kingly title of *King of Annam* granted by the Chinese emperors in detail, but rather followed their own procedures. This practice caused confusion for the Chinese including both the Southern Song and the Mongols. In the case of Trần Thái Tông, Vietnamese annals did not record when he received the kingly title by the Chinese emperor but *An Nam Chí Lược* did note that Trần Thái Tông received the title of *King of Annam* by the Southern Song

people believe in the righteousness of such a tributary system was unknown from the historical extant texts. Nevertheless, they did treat it as a diplomatic method to adjust the compliance and resistance with the Chinese dynasties historically.

In the foreign relations with the Southern Song and the Mongol Empires, Trần Thái Tông employed different approaches although he sent envoys and articles of tribute to both parties. With respect to the Southern Song, Trần Thái Tông realized that they shared the same enemy with Đại Việt, i.e., the Mongol Empire. Therefore, keeping a friendly relationship with the Southern Song would pacify the Northern borderlands of Đại Việt. The longer the Southern Song resisted the Mongol attacks, the more Đại Việt could strengthen its forces. On the contrary, the bilateral relation between Đại Việt and the Mongols had a different tenor. Both Đại Việt and the Mongols were devastated after the 1258 war. Although Đại Việt won at the end, the capital city Thăng Long suffered severe damage. It was just a matter of time, and the Mongols would be back to conquer Đại Việt so that they could expand their rule toward Southeast Asia. But despite their bold and strong forces, the Mongols' defeat in the war with Đại Việt did not affect them to the core. The Mongols changed their priorities and would conquer the Southern Song first in order to unify the Chinese mainland. Therefore, it was convenient to cooperate with Đại Việt even in diplomatically to put pressure on the Southern Song. Thus, the three-way shuttle diplomacy between Đại Việt, the Southern Song, and the Mongol Empire seemed to be a complicated interdependence in which each party kept watching and taking advantage of the other.

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Emperor Lisong 宋理宗 (1225-1264) when the Đại Việt envoys sent tribute in 1228-1233. By receiving the title of *King of Annam* from the Song's Emperor, Trần Thái Tông obviously kept his loyalty to the Song court until the time of his retirement. See Lê, *An Nam Chí Lược*, 105.

Both the Southern Song and the Yuan-Mongol wanted to delay the abdication of Trần Thái Tông because they had either needed Đại Việt as an ally or observed Đại Việt's relation with the other. Đại Việt kept sending articles of tribute to both Chinese states while there was no formal submission of Đại Việt's king as requested. In addition, the Trần court also refused to release hostages to both Chinese states in accordance with its previous tributary agreement. These bold gestures showed that the Trần court was in good shape and willing to resist any attempts at violating Đại Việt's sovereignty and territorial dignity. The delaying or approving of the abdication of Trần Thái Tông as well as granting the title of *King of Annam* to Trần Thái Tông's successor became the next theme in the foreign relations of the three states. Both Chinese and Vietnamese historical sources recorded this event clearly. The *An Nam Chí Lược* and the *Toàn Thư* said that the Mongol Empire granted the title of *King of Annam* to Trần Thái Tông's successor, Trần Thánh Tông, in 1261. Following this, the Southern Song also took the same action in 1262.

Regardless of his having renounced the throne, the senior king Trần Thái Tông was still the chief decision maker for the Trần court in this three-way shuttle diplomacy. Both the Southern Song and the Mongols also referred to Trần Thái Tông or to both kings-Trần Thái Tông and his successor-in diplomatic letters. To understand roles of the senior king Trần Thái Tông in the diplomatic achievements of Đại Việt, let us review some of his negotiations with the Mongol Khans. Right after the Mongol-Đại Việt War in 1258, Trần Thái Tông sent Lê Phụ Trần and Chu Bác Lãm to Yunnan to discuss the timeline and articles of tribute. The main purpose of Trần Thái Tông in this diplomatic affair was to ease the tension between the two countries and to gather intelligence from

the Mongol army. Trần Thái Tông also wanted to show the Mongols that Đại Việt was strong enough to deal with them. Due to these friendly gestures, Möngke Khan agreed with Đại Việt's tributary terms. The Mongol Khan further asked for a personal paying of respect from Trần Thái Tông. However, the senior king Trần Thái Tông made excuses for not presenting himself before the Mongol Khan. This reflected the intention of an uncompromising Trần Thái Tông for the sake of protecting the dignity of Đại Việt.

Trần Thái Tông was on similarly friendly terms with the next Mongol ruler, Kublai Khan.<sup>210</sup> On his imperial letter to the Trần court in 1261, Kublai even promised not to enter Đại Việt. The *Toàn Thư* said,

... as you are sincere in your endeavour to submit, and to send presents and local products, I now send an envoy and a vice-envoy to your country. As for your usual customs and styles of government, you can continue as before, there is no need to change anything, just like in the case of the king of Korea... I have ordered my generals in Yunnan not to violate your country, or cause trouble to your people again... on your part, everybody in your country, from the top mandarin to the ordinary people, should remain (in place) ...<sup>211</sup>

The promise to not violate Đại Việt or cause trouble to the Vietnamese people was followed by the visit by the Mongol envoy Zhang Lidao/Trương Lập Đạo in 1265.<sup>212</sup> Historical sources record that the meeting with the Mongol envoy was the last diplomatic event that Trần Thái Tông participated in on behalf of the Trần court. When seeing this envoy off, Trần Thái Tông wrote him a poem that showed his deep friendship. Zhang Lidao showed his respect to Trần Thái Tông and the Trần court in the same way. The

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<sup>210</sup> In 1259 Möngke Khan had been killed in battle, and so Kublai had to stop his activities in Yunnan and go back to the Mongolian capital Karakorum for a meeting with royal families in order to choose a new Great Khan. This would be a bloodbath in the history of the Mongol Empire. Due to this event, Kublai forged a truce with the Southern Song and remained in a cordial relationship with Đại Việt. Kublai successfully claimed himself the Great Khan of the Mongol Empire in 1260.

<sup>211</sup> *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 28. This passage is translated by Vu, "The Mongol Navy," 21.

<sup>212</sup> Zhang Lidao was a trustworthy mandarin of Kublai Khan. Besides his meeting with Trần Thái Tông in 1265, he visited Đại Việt once again in 1290 during the reign of Trần Nhân Tông.

relationship between Đại Việt and the Mongol Empire was cordial during the early reign of Kublai Khan. Given these actions, it is safe to conclude that Trần Thái Tông was active in following all the moves of the Southern Song and the Mongols as well as in making decisions regarding the foreign affairs of Đại Việt. It does not mean that he clung onto his political power or position, but rather, that he wanted to train his successor king in how to deal with a strong enemy like the Mongols in a complicated diplomatic context between the three states.

Trần Thái Tông had thus set a firm foundation for later Trần kings' vision of foreign policy. Later Trần kings continued to follow Trần Thái Tông's intention by practicing a policy of appeasement toward the Chinese dynasties while maintaining the independence, dignity, and territorial integrity of Đại Việt. For example, Trần Thái Tông's successor, king Trần Thánh Tông also refused to visit the Mongol court in person even though Kublai Khan sent envoys to Đại Việt almost every year to request his personal submission. Such an uncompromising spirit was indeed initiated by Trần Thái Tông. In addition, Trần Thánh Tông maintained a peaceful attitude with the Southern Song until the three-way shuttle diplomacy between the three states fell apart in 1271.<sup>213</sup> Due to their intentions in foreign policy, the Trần kings maintained Đại Việt's independence for nearly three decades from the first to the second Mongol invasion of Đại Việt.<sup>214</sup> These three decades were important for Đại Việt to consolidate national

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<sup>213</sup> In 1271, Kublai Khan proclaimed the Chinese Yuan Dynasty. In 1274, the Southern Song was defeated in the battle at Xiangyang. Due to the collapse of the Southern Song, the three-way shuttle diplomacy of the three states had also declined.

<sup>214</sup> From 1265 on, the Mongols started to request more articles of tribute every time the Đại Việt's envoys came to Yunnan. In 1267, Kublai Khan sent two imperial letters to rebuke the Trần court for not following the "six requirements of vassal states." These two letters started a long-term diplomatic battle between Đại Việt and the Mongols for another two decades. Vu Hong Lien, in her article entitled "The Mongol Navy: Kublai Khan's Invasions in Đại Việt and Champa," provides detail on the diplomatic

strength and get ready for further wars with the Mongols during the reigns of Trần Thái Tông's son and grandson. Beginning with Trần Thái Tông, the model of abdication became the family tradition of the Trần dynasty, which also signified the success of Trần Thái Tông as the founder and a political leader of Đại Việt.

These diplomatic achievements of Trần Thái Tông during the first seven years after his abdication mark a conclusion of the King's political career and the opening of a new phase in his spiritual cultivation. During this time, Trần Thái Tông spent more time on building Buddhist centers, composing Buddhist texts, and dedicating himself to Buddhist practices. In the following section, we will have a close observation of the King's last years based on Vietnamese historical sources and the TDL.

## 2. His Last Years

With a sincere dedication to Buddhism, Trần Thái Tông also had a proper preparation for his practices. After his abdication, Trần Thái Tông moved to Thiên Trường, homeland of the Trần family, and resided at Trùng Quang Palace beginning in 1262. On the west side of his residence, Phổ Minh Temple was built so that he could conduct his practices or organize Buddhist events there. The *Toàn Thư* points out that all subsequent senior Trần kings also resided at Trùng Quang Palace.<sup>215</sup> It is highly likely that later senior Trần kings would dedicate themselves to Buddhist practices at Phổ Minh Temple, following Trần Thái Tông's example.

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dialogue between Đại Việt and the Mongols during this time until the second and the third Mongol invasions of Đại Việt and Southeast Asia. In such a diplomacy, Đại Việt either demonstrated appeasement or bold gestures toward the Mongols without hesitating because they knew that direct wars with the Mongols were inevitable. See more Vu, "The Mongol Navy," 21-23.

<sup>215</sup> *Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, 35.



The TĐL reveals some interesting pieces of information regarding his activities at Phổ Minh Temple, such as making offering to five hundred Buddhist monks every day and inviting Buddhist monks for Dharma discussions. Trần Thái Tông admitted over thirty disciples under him.<sup>216</sup> The TĐL also mentions several Buddhist figures that Trần Thái Tông had encountered, learned from, and exchanged Buddhist understanding and practice with. The first was the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm, whom we came across in the Section II of this chapter. In addition, Trần Thái Tông also had a close relationship with two Chinese Thiền masters of Linji/Lâm Tế Thiền sect named Tianfeng (天封 Thiên Phong) and Decheng (德誠 Đức Thành). They were Chinese Buddhists who possibly came to Vietnam during or after the fall of the Southern Song dynasty.

The account of Tianfeng in Vietnam is quite vague.<sup>217</sup> Two main sources that provide some information related to Tianfeng are the *Lược Dẫn Thiền Phái Đồ* and TĐL. The *Lược Dẫn Thiền Phái Đồ* refers to Tianfeng as a lay Chinese Chan master of the Linji/Lâm Tế Thiền sect who was a contemporary of Ứng Thuận and one of the masters of the National Preceptor Đại Đăng, Venerable Nan Tư, and King Trần Thánh Tông (the

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<sup>216</sup> TĐL may mistake Phổ Minh Temple with Tư Phúc Temple. It said, “Next to [Trùng Quang] Palace, the [senior] king built Tư Phúc Temple as a place to burn incense for spiritual cultivation. In addition, he also invited an outstanding Thiền monk to be the abbot there so that he [Trần Thái Tông] could visit and discuss the Dharma with him conveniently. Every day, the King made offerings to over five hundred Buddhist monks. He had more than thirty disciples [in his lifetime].” Tư Phúc Temple was built during the Lý dynasty and many Lý-Trần kings paid visits and supported the temple. Huyền Quang, the third Trúc Lâm Patriarch, also resided there. However, it located in Côn Sơn (present day Hải Dương) which was far away from Trùng Quang Palace where Trần Thái Tông lived during his retirement.

<sup>217</sup> Lê Mạnh Thát hypothesizes that Tianfeng came to Đại Việt before the year 1274, when the Chinese people of the Song dynasty came to Vietnam by boat due to the Southern Song-Mongol wars. See Lê, *Trần Thái Tông*, 133-134.

This hypothesis is reasonable, yet it also does exclude the possibility that Tianfeng came to Vietnam in 1274. Because Trần Thái Tông may have paid more attention to Tianfeng if he had come together with the refugees from the Southern Song. Additionally, it was also possible that Tianfeng could have come to Vietnam several times and either gone back to China or settled down in Vietnam, since Trần Thái Tông was so devoted to Buddhist practices.

Due to lack of data, these possibilities are all equal possibilities.

successor of Trần Thái Tông). The TĐL only mentions Tianfeng's name once, when it says that Trần Thái Tông had a deeper understanding of Thiền teaching after his encounter with Tianfeng, a Thiền master from the Song. The TĐL also confirms that this encounter took place after Trần Thái Tông had written the *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam Ca*.<sup>218</sup> The encounter between Trần Thái Tông and Tianfeng, a Chinese Linji Chan master, suggests an influence of Linji Chan school on the Trần dynasty. Around the time as his encounter with Decheng, Trần Thái Tông wrote his essay entitled *The Recorded Sayings between the Master and his Disciples* (語錄問答門下 *Ngữ Lục Vấn Đáp Môn Hạ*). This composition signified a development of the “recorded sayings” (語錄 *ngữ lục*) genre of Buddhist literature in medieval Vietnam.

(i) *Encounter with the Chinese Monk Decheng: Signs of the King's Awakening*

Decheng (德誠 Đức Thành) was a Chinese Linji Chan monk who had come to Đại Việt from the Southern Song. The *Ngữ Lục Vấn Đáp Môn Hạ*, the TĐL and the *Việt Sử Tiêu Án* recorded the dialogue between Trần Thái Tông and this monk in the style of the “recorded sayings” genre. In his *Thiền Tông Bản Hạnh*, Chân Nguyên rewrote this story in poetry based on the TĐL and the *Việt Sử Tiêu Án*. There were some differences among these records, yet they all showed that Trần Thái Tông had received the mind-seal of Thiền Buddhism.

The *Ngữ Lục Vấn Đáp Môn Hạ* was then a part of the *Essays* and said that Thiền master Decheng met Trần Thái Tông at Chân Giáo Buddhist Temple. Both TĐL and *Việt Sử Tiêu Án* did not provide details of the location. The *Việt Sử Tiêu Án* wrote, “After Thái Tông gave up the throne, he often visited Buddhist temples such as Quỳnh Lâm, [and]

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<sup>218</sup> Thích, *Thánh Đăng Lục*, 15.

Hoa Yên. He [the King] met Decheng who had come [to Đại Việt] by boat from the Song, then had a talk with him.”<sup>219</sup> In this account, Trần Thái Tông seemed to meet Decheng while traveling to different Buddhist temples, yet Chân Nguyên said Decheng had learned of Trần Thái Tông’s reputation as a devout Buddhist; hence, he alone wandered up hill and down dale to visit the King in his royal palace.

The dialogue between Trần Thái Tông and Decheng in the *Ngữ Lục Vấn Đáp Môn Hạ* (1883 Edition, printed at An Ninh Buddhist Temple) proceeded as follows:

One day, the King visited Chân Giáo Buddhist Temple. Song Decheng/Tổng Đức Thành came and asked:

“What does it mean that the World Honored One had not left Tushita Heaven, yet descended to the imperial palace already; had not left his mother’s womb, yet liberated all beings already?”

The King said:

“Water of a thousand rivers reflects thousand moons.

Cloudlessness of ten thousand miles makes sky of ten thousand miles.”

The Monk asked:

“[The Buddha] has not left [Tushita Heaven], has not been born, yet gives teachings. What would it be like if he had left [Tushita Heaven] and had been born?”

The King said:

“Cloud flies over top of a mountain is white

Water flows to Tiêu Tương river is pure alike.”

The Monk asked:

“After the rain, the scene of a mountain appears clear. After the cloud disappears, the center of a cave is bright. Why is it said that appearing and disappearing are alike?”

...

The King again said:

“With no-intention, water flows down a mountain

With no-mind originally, cloud comes out of a cave.”

The Monk remained silent.

The metaphors and poetic expressions in Trần Thái Tông’s answers to the Chinese monk Decheng were conventional and typical of the Chinese model of Chan encounter dialogues. The Chinese Chan masters of the Tang and Song periods believed

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<sup>219</sup> Ngô, *Việt Sử Tiêu Án*, 76.

poetic language could be the only means to express the ultimate or non-dual reality of Chan truth. Trần Thái Tông seemed to capture the poetic language very well; and above all, he included himself among the enlightened ones of the “literary” Chan or Thiền Buddhism.

To emphasize the legitimation of Trần Thái Tông as an enlightened master, the TĐL says that the Chinese monk bowed to the King at the end of their conversation instead of remaining silent, as was written in the *Ngũ Lục Vấn Đáp Môn Hạ*. The *Việt Sử Tiêu Án* also presented an interesting question from Decheng as related to the King’s awakening. It reads:

Decheng again asked:

“His Majesty, how and in which conditions have you attained awakening?”

The King replied:

“You and I are like two trees that have fire within. Dao is only one that is as big as Heaven and Earth when stretching out; yet as small as the top of a hair when shrinking. Each person has an oriental pearl within, like flowers are blooming in spring.”

Decheng showed admiration for the King’s awakening.<sup>220</sup>

In these accounts, Trần Thái Tông obviously could validate the awakening of someone else (印證 *ấn chứng*) because he was a legitimate master. An interesting point here is that Trần Thái Tông chose a Chinese monk as his disciple after Đại Việt defeated the Mongols (later the Chinese Yuan dynasty). This intention might have been evidence of another victory of Trần Thái Tông, this time on the intellectual level. In some way, this could have satisfied the wish to be superior or equal with the Chinese counterpart of the Vietnamese people. Following that intention, later Vietnamese Buddhist texts added that the Chinese monk Decheng would pay respect and admiration to the King for his instruction in this encounter dialogue. In other words, either Trần Thái Tông or later

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<sup>220</sup> Lê, *Trần Thái Tông*, 140-141.

Vietnamese Buddhist writers have identified the King as a supreme political ruler and an enlightened master of the Thiền school, which represented the highest form of Vietnamese Buddhism during the Trần dynasty.

(ii) *His Death and Legacy*

Another stroke to complete the picture of Trần Thái Tông in the role of an enlightened master is the fearless and admirable way he faced his death. Both Vietnamese historical records and the TĐL state that the King had known of his death in advance. The *Toàn Thư* states that Trần Thái Tông died on the first day of the fourth month in the fifth year of Bảo Phù (1277) in Vạn Thọ Palace, which was exactly as the King had predicted months prior. Trần Thái Tông was then buried at Chiêu Lăng on the fourth day of the tenth month of that year and granted “Thái Tông” as temple name and “Thông Thiên Ngự Cực Long Công Mậu Đức Hiên Hòa Hựu Thuận Thần Văn Thánh Vũ Nguyên Hiếu Hoàng Đế” as his posthumous name. While historical records such as the *Toàn Thư* interpret the ability of Trần Thái Tông to predict his own death to be based on his excelled knowledge of observing auspicious signs, the TĐL writes about his last days in a manner befitting awakened Thiền masters. It reads:

The King (Trần Thái Tông) was sick, Thánh Tông visited him and asked:  
“Emptiness and nothingness are different or the same?”

The King replied:

“Emptiness is one only. Because of discrimination of ignorance and enlightenment, there are differences of emptiness and nothingness. It is like a room that is bright when its doors are opened but dark when they are closed. Brightness and darkness are different, but the room is one only.”

The next day, the National Preceptor visited him and asked:

“His Majesty, are you sick?”

The King said:

“The four elements are sick, yet such a thing has not been related to birth and death since beginningless time, so how would I be stuck in sickness?”

After several days, the King remained in noble silence, let attendants stay outside, entrusted the country’s affairs to Thánh Tông. Thánh Tông wanted to

invite the National Preceptors Trúc Lâm and Đại Đăng to come and deliver supramundane Dharma talks to [Thái Tông]. In a serious voice, the King said:

“In this stage, to lessen a bit like flesh carved out of wounds and to add a bit more like dust in my eyes. To Buddhas in the three time periods, I look at them with two straight eyes. To patriarchs, we are equal. Either mysterious words of Phù Vân or Đại Đăng are redundant which are useless for such a thing.”

After finishing his words, the King quietly deceased at the age of sixty in the first year of Thiệu Bảo Era (Kỷ Mão–1279).<sup>221</sup>

The record of TĐL has thus described the last days of Trần Thái Tông as an enlightened one. The notable point of this record is that all figures, including Trần Thái Tông, his successor Trần Thánh Tông, the National Preceptor Phù Vân, and the next National Preceptor Đại Đăng were talking about the Thiền truth rather than just asking about Trần Thái Tông’s health condition. The questions of Trần Thánh Tông and the National Preceptor played as a means to confirm the awakening of Trần Thái Tông before his death. At first, Trần Thánh Tông asked about the difference between “emptiness” and “nothingness,” then the National Preceptor Đại Đăng asked about his sickness, and the last was his refusal to listen to the “supramundane Dharma talks” of the National Preceptors Phù Vân and Đại Đăng. The King replied to all questions with his clear mind, indicating that he was completely the master of his life and death. Trần Thái Tông considered himself as equal with the patriarchs so that he would look directly into the eyes of the Buddhas in the three time periods. Thus, the author of the TĐL tried to say this was the death of an enlightened one who had known it beforehand and was well-prepared for death by understanding the nature of sickness, by reflecting on one’s cultivation, and by leaving the physical body in peace.

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<sup>221</sup> TĐL was the only extant text providing an account of the last days of Trần Thái Tông in detail. However, there was a difference in the King’s death year. This would be an error of the TĐL because Trần Thái Tông was born in 1218; therefore, if he lived for 60 years as all historical records wrote, he would have passed away in 1277 (Đinh Sửu – the fifth year of Bảo Phù era). See Thích, *Thánh Đăng Lục*, 17.

Regarding the legacy of Trần Thái Tông, the *Essays* is the only extant collection of the King's writings among many others that were mentioned by some Vietnamese bibliographies. The TDL listed three works composed by Trần Thái Tông, namely, *A Collection of Literary Works* (文集 *Văn Tập*) in one fascicle, *Guide to Thiền Buddhism in Verses* (*Chỉ Nam Ca*) in one fascicle, and the *Essays* in ten fascicles. The first two works were lost, and the *Essays* is the only collection of all extant writings of the King that are circulated among scholars of Vietnamese Buddhism at present. Lê Quý Đôn's *Book of Arts and Literature* (藝文誌 *Nghệ Văn Chí*) and Phan Huy Chú's *Book of Culture and Literature* (文籍誌 *Văn Tịch Chí*), and a chapter in the *Categorized Records of the Institutions of Successive Dynasties* (歷朝憲章類誌 *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại Chí*), mention that Trần Thái Tông was the author of the *Dynastic Magistrature* (朝廷通判 *Triều Đình Thông Phán*) in twenty fascicles, the *Rules and Precedents of the Kiến Trung Era* (建中常例 *Kiến Trung Thường Lệ*) in ten fascicles, the *Imperial Collection of Trần Thái Tông* (陳太宗御集 *Trần Thái Tông Ngự Tập*) in one fascicle, as well as the *Essays*. The first three works were lost. Therefore, the *Essays* is the only source that can inform scholars about the religious ideas and practices of Trần Thái Tông. We will have a more informative discussion of the *Essays* in the next chapter of the dissertation.

## V. Chapter Conclusion

The chapter provides a thorough biography of Trần Thái Tông, the first king of the Trần dynasty and the author of the *Essays*. The enthronement of Trần Thái Tông marked a noteworthy transition of the two dynasties in medieval Vietnam, which was known as the so-called “unbloody transition” of political power. Although Trần Thủ Độ

put him on the throne, Trần Thái Tông always found his ways to be a worthy ruler. The attempt of this biography is to offer a true image of Trần Thái Tông as one who bravely dealt with his personal issues, and who was willing to seek advice from a spiritual master to transform his roles as a political ruler and as a religious leader. Observing his life closely, I would argue that Trần Thủ Độ had seen Trần Thái Tông's potential and the qualities of a benevolent king who would set a firm foundation for the Trần dynasty.

On the political field, Trần Thái Tông reformed the administrative and educational systems, improved the quality of life for the Vietnamese people, defeated the Mongol invasion, established flexible and effective diplomatic policies in foreign affairs for the sake of the independence of the state. These contributions originated from his encounter with the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm in 1236. This meeting transformed both political and religious views of the King. The advice of the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm to Trần Thái Tông was summed up in a single sentence: “to take the will of people as your will, to take the hearts of people as your heart” while not forgetting to study the scriptures and dedicating oneself to Buddhist practices. This piece of advice embraced both Confucian and Buddhist teachings. It became the guiding teaching for Trần Thái Tông as he made the decision to return to his kingship in 1236, led Đại Việt to repel the Mongols in 1258, and finally gave up the throne and dedicated himself to Buddhism in the last twenty years of his life. Thus, the advice of the National Preceptor played an important role in providing guidance to Trần Thái Tông so that he could develop himself in tandem as a political ruler and as a cultivator of religious practice.

The relationship between Trần Thái Tông and the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm suggests a strong connection between Buddhism and the state. However, it is a stretch to



believe that Buddhism controlled the Trần court. In other words, Buddhist monks during the reign of Trần Thái Tông or during the Trần dynasty did not really involve themselves in managing the domestic or foreign affairs of the state. Buddhist monks, even those in the position of the National Preceptor, simply played a role as the religious or spiritual advisor of the Trần kings. The advice of the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm was more or less the Confucian approach in ruling the state. Following that, according to in the narrative of Trần Thái Tông in the *Preface to Guide to Thiền Buddhism*, he was supporting the syncretic views of Confucianism and Buddhism in which the Confucian sage should propagate Buddhist teachings in the worldly world.

The abdication of Trần Thái Tông became a family tradition throughout the Trần dynasty. This practice not only guaranteed a proper training for the successor kings, but also showed that the Trần kings were willing to give up political power so that they could dedicate themselves to Buddhist practices. One of the notable examples of this family tradition was the case of Trần Nhân Tông, the third king of the Trần dynasty. Trần Nhân Tông took a further step when he even renounced the householder life after defeating the Mongols in their third attempt at invasion, and then became the First Patriarch of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect. In terms of Buddhist practices, Trần Thái Tông portrayed himself as someone who had great potential for awakening by reminding us of the story of the Great Renunciation of the Buddha and explaining his awakening in the same way as the Sixth Chinese Chan Patriarch Huineng. His Buddhist compositions were collected into the *Essays*, which are esteemed not only for their historical and literary values but also because they represent the King's syncretic views of Buddhist teachings and practices.

These are in the flow of Vietnamese syncretic Buddhism or the so-called Thiền Buddhism.

**PART II:**

**TEXT**

## Chapter Four:

### *Essays on Emptiness*

This chapter examines the textual development of the *Essays*, the extant collection of Trần Thái Tông's Buddhist writings, which is one of the most important works of medieval Vietnamese Buddhist literature. Trần Thái Tông originally composed the *Essays* in classical Chinese. When the Nôm script 喃 (chữ Nôm), a logographic writing system that was used to write the Vietnamese language, became popular, Tuệ Tĩnh wrote a commentary on the *Essays* in Nôm script alongside the original texts in the fourteenth century.<sup>222</sup> This commentary marks an important event for the textual development of the *Essays* because the Nôm script was more readable for a larger Vietnamese population. There is another commentary of Phúc Điền in Nôm script alongside another edition of the *Essays* in the nineteenth century. At that time, the textual development of the *Essays* moved into a new stage when the French colonial administration enforced the use of the script of Vietnamese national language (*chữ quốc ngữ*) in the early of the twentieth century. As a consequence, many translations of the *Essays* into the modern Vietnamese writing system came into existence during and after 1930s. The continuous existence of

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<sup>222</sup> There are two theories related to Tuệ Tĩnh 慧靜 (or 惠靜/慧靖) and the date of *Thiền Tông Khóa Hư Ngữ Lục*. First, scholars like Lê Trần Đức, Mai Hồng, Phó Đức Thảo, Lâm Giang, Đào Duy Anh and Trần Trọng Dương claimed that Tuệ Tĩnh was born and wrote this work in the fourteenth century. Following this theory, Trần Trọng Dương tried to picture a development of Nôm script of the latter Trần in *Thiền Tông Khóa Hư Ngữ Lục* which is believed to be prior to *Quốc Âm Thi Tập* of Nguyễn Trãi in the fifteenth century. See Trần, *Nghiên Cứu Chữ Nôm*, 3-4 and 23-26.

Second, some scholars like Trần Văn Giáp, Hà Văn Tấn, Đỗ Tất Lợi, Lâm Văn Quán and Lê Mạnh Thát have proven that Tuệ Tĩnh was a monk and a doctor of traditional medicine who was active during the seventeenth century by means of a stone stele found at Giám Buddhist Temple. This theory arose in the last three decades of the twentieth century. See Lê, *Trần Thái Tông*, 171-173.

Both theories have their flaws, which serve the purposes of the writers. While the first theory makes the date of *Thiền Tông Khóa Hư Ngữ Lục* closer to the author of the original compositions of the *Essays* (Trần Thái Tông), the second theory creates a connection between Tráng Tử Vô Dật Tuệ Tĩnh 戀子無逸慧靜 (as mentioned in *Thiền Tông Khóa Hư Ngữ Lục*) and Chân An Giác Tính Tuệ Tĩnh 真安覺性慧靜 (the name on the stone stele of Giám Buddhist Temple).

the *Essays* in different forms of Vietnamese writing system demonstrates the relevance of the collection in terms of its literary and religious values.

In this chapter, I will review the forms and structures of the *Essays* based on all available extant editions and printed copies of the collection that are preserved in the Library of the Sino-Nôm Institute (hereafter SNI) and the National Library of Vietnam (hereafter NLV). From these resources, we come to know that the earliest extant edition of the *Essays* (AB. 268) is the Huệ Duyên's edition dating from 1631. This edition was possibly based on the edition that Tuệ Tĩnh wrote a commentary for in Nôm in the fourteenth century. Therefore, all assumptions regarding to the forms, structures, and contents of the *Essays* before 1631 are for reference only and require new discoveries of historical data as supporting evidence.

While the *Preface to the Procedure* is lost in some extant edition of the *Essays*, the main body of the *Procedure* remains quite consistent across editions. Placing the *Procedure* into the framework of the *Essays*, we know that repentance practice is one of the main cultivations of the King. It is not only because the *Procedure* is designed for six continuous divisions of a day, but also because there is another repentance manual called the *Equal Ritual of Repentance Texts* found in the *Essays*. An appreciation of the underlying historical and textual development of the *Essays* is necessary for an understanding of the context of the *Procedure*.

## I. Variant Editions

There are likely five editions of the *Essays*. According to TDL (p.11b3-4), the *Essays* consisted of ten fascicles while was only one fascicle that was recorded in the *Book of Culture and Literature* (文籍誌 *Văn Tịch Chí*), a chapter in the *Categorized*

*Records of the Institutions of Successive Dynasties* (歷朝憲章類誌 *Lịch Triều Hiến*

*Chương Loại Chí*, p.83b7-84a2) composed by Phan Huy Chú. These two editions are no longer in extant.<sup>223</sup> Lê Mạnh Thát has proposed a structure of the ten-fascicle and one-fascicle editions of the *Essays*. He further raised the question as to whether the collection had been done by Trần Thái Tông himself or before 1357-the year Trần Minh Tông, the last figure as mentioned in TĐL, passed away).<sup>224</sup> This is an intentional effort to prove a continuous development of the collection since Trần Thái Tông.

The three other editions, which are either in three fascicles or in two fascicles, have nine different printed copies, which are preserved in the SNI and the NLV. Based on the two resources, Nguyễn Huệ Chi was the first Vietnamese scholar who explored a suggestive textual development of the *Essays* in the *Poetry and Literature of the Lý-Trần Dynasties* (*Thơ Văn Lý Trần*, hereafter referred to as TVLT).<sup>225</sup> Similarly, Trần Văn Giáp in the *Han Nom Books Treasury* (*Tìm hiểu kho sách Hán Nôm*)<sup>226</sup> had provided a brief introduction of extant variant editions of the *Essays* in three and two fascicles. While the scope of this study mainly focuses on the philosophical and religious aspects of the collection, I will inherit those previous studies regarding textual development of the *Essays* and will add a comparison of the two editions in terms of their structure for an

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<sup>223</sup> The issue of the *Essays* in one and ten fascicles is no longer extant. Therefore, we have no clue of the content of the text or as structure of each fascicle. The TĐL, written during the latter Trần dynasty, mentions a ten-fascicle edition of the *Essays*, which means that author of TĐL used to have or read the Trần edition of the *Essays*. The *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam Ca* may be a separate text and other essays possibly have better or more complete forms in comparison with later editions of the *Essays* that we have accessed to nowadays. For the one-fascicle edition of the *Essays* as mentioned by the *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí*, the composer would just list all the King's writings together.

<sup>224</sup> Lê, *Trần Thái Tông*, 182-186.

<sup>225</sup> Nguyễn, *Thơ Văn Lý Trần*, Vol. 1, 108-111.

<sup>226</sup> Trần, *Kho sách Hán Nôm*, Vol. 2, 218-219.

easier grasp of the collection. To capture the structure of the *Essays* in these three available editions, I have provided a comparative table in the Appendix A.

### 1. The Three-fascicle Extant Editions

In this group, there are two extant editions with seven printed copies as preserved in the SNI and NLV. Vietnamese scholars have called them after the monks' names, Huệ Duyên and Phúc Điền, respectively, who reprinted the *Essays* in the seventeenth and the nineteenth century. Both editions have three fascicles, and they share the similarities regarding the contents and structures of the *Essays*. The two editions include the Nôm interpretation alongside the original Chinese texts. Since this study does not emphasize the language aspect of the *Essays*, the introduction of the Nôm interpretation is for reference regarding the textual development of the collection only. Instead, I will investigate the structures and contents of the extant editions of the *Essays*.

The Huệ Duyên's edition, henceforth referred to as *Edition 1*, was housed in the SNI in a form of a handwritten form, numbered AB. 268. The equivalent version preserved in the NLV is the R. 2004. The edition was entitled *The Essays on Emptiness of Thiền Buddhism* (禪宗課虛錄 *Thiền Tông Khoá Hư Lục*), followed by the subtitle, the *Caodong Thiền Lineage* (曹洞禪宗 *Tào Động Thiền Tông*). According to the *Preface to the Essays*, it is said that Venerable Huệ Duyên<sup>227</sup> of Sùng Quang Temple found the *Essays*, became inspired after reading it, and then he called for donation to reprint the collection<sup>228</sup> in 1631.<sup>229</sup> Obviously, there was an earlier version of the *Essays* from which

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<sup>227</sup> Huệ Duyên 惠緣 (n.d) was a monk of Từ Quán Sùng Quang Buddhist Temple in Giao Thủy District, Thiên Trường (present day Nam Định).

<sup>228</sup> *Khuyến cập đa nhân, cộng xuất gia tư, mệnh công tâm tử. 勸及多人, 共出家資, 命工鋟梓。*

Huệ Duyệt reprinted the whole collection. The woodblocks of the *Essays* that were made by Huệ Duyệt were also no longer in existence. Therefore, *Edition 1* has significant meaning for retracing a history of the textual development of the *Essays*.

*Edition 1* consists of seventy-seven sheets of mulberry paper in one hundred and fifty-four pages in which the Chinese and Nôm characters are written on the same page. It starts with a preface by Huệ Duyệt, followed by a collection of the King's compositions and an anonymous afterword at the end of the work. Tuệ Tĩnh wrote the Nôm interpretation and commentary in a smaller size in which two smaller lines of the Nôm followed a single line of the original Chinese characters of the *Essays*. Although the manuscript is dated in the seventeenth century, the Nôm interpretation of Tuệ Tĩnh suggests a possible edition of the *Essays* from the fourteenth century. There is a chance that *Edition 1* was a handwritten copy of the fourteenth century's edition, or some other edition dated from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. Trần Trọng Dương suggests that *Edition 1* was possibly a fixed version of the *Essays* that was printed or handwritten repeatedly over several centuries.<sup>230</sup>

The criteria for a division of the *Essays* in this edition is the type and the length of the writings. Fascicle One consists of separate compositions in different topics while Fascicle Two and Fascicle Three are the body text of the *Procedure*. *Edition 1* also offers a table of contents in the beginning of the collection which leaves out any mention of the *Preface to the Procedure*. This is probably a mistake of the copyist. Another limitation of

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<sup>229</sup> Lê Triều Long Đức tam niên tuế thứ Tân Mùi trọng đông vọng nhật bái soạn. 黎朝隆德參年歲次辛未仲冬望日拜撰。 (*Edition 1*: 3a5)

For the correction of the year from Long Đức to Đức Long, see Lê, *Trần Thái Tông*, 186-188.

<sup>230</sup> Trần, *Nghiên Cứu Chữ Nôm*, 31.



the handwritten version is the problems of occasionally omitted words or even whole sections of the original edition, as well as misspelling of some of the classical Chinese or Nôm characters. Regardless of these flaws, *Edition 1* is valuable for studying the *Essays* as it is the earliest extant version of the collection.

The second extant edition of the *Essays* in three fascicles is often called the Phúc Điền's edition, henceforth referred as *Edition 2*. There are several printed copies of this edition in the library of SNI under the identification numbers A. 1531, A. 1426, and AB. 367, printed respectively in 1840, 1856, and 1861. Another printed copy (VHv. 1482) is originated from the library of Yên Ninh Buddhist Temple. The equivalent printed version preserved in the NLV is the R. 1200. *Edition 2* was entitled *A Collection of the Essays on Emptiness Compiled by Emperor Trần Thái Tông* (太宗皇帝御製課虛集 *Thái Tông Hoàng Đế Ngự Chế Khóa Hư Tập*), prefaced by Nguyễn Thận Hiên. Venerable Phúc Điền<sup>231</sup> and his disciples carved woodblocks and printed the *Essays* along with the Nôm interpretation written by Phúc Điền himself. This edition with Nôm interpretation is also named the *Essays on Emptiness in National Language* (課虛國音 *Khóa Hư Quốc Âm*).<sup>232</sup>

The composition of *Khóa Hư Quốc Âm* played a significant role for the popularity of the *Essays* among Vietnamese scholars and Buddhist followers of the nineteenth

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<sup>231</sup> Phúc Điền 福田 (1784-1862) was an influential monk of nineteenth century. He built Thiên Quang Buddhist Temple in Mount Đại Hưng (present-day Hanoi), resided at Liên Tông Buddhist Temple in Hà Đông. Phúc Điền was known for recollecting and reprinting valuable Buddhist texts or interpreting them into Nôm. Phương Viên of Bồ Sơn Buddhist Temple in Tiên Du, Bắc Ninh helped Phúc Điền in revising, engraving the woodblocks, and reprinting the Buddhist texts.

Phúc Điền also composed *Đại Nam Thiền Uyển Truyền Đăng Tập Lục* 大南禪苑傳燈集錄. This text shares the same style with *Thiền Uyển*. In *Đại Nam Thiền Uyển Tập Lục*, Phúc Điền list 23 Thiền masters of Trúc Lâm Thiền sect since Hiện Quang (d. 1221) to Vô Phiền (n.d) creating a lineage for the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect.

<sup>232</sup> Phúc Điền placed *Khóa Hư Quốc Âm* 課虛國音 in a volume called *Kim Cang–Phát Nguyện–Khóa Hư Quốc Âm* 金剛–發願–課虛國音. This volume has ninety-six sheets, two pages in each sheet of paper which was made in twenty-one years (1840-1861). The *Khóa Hư Quốc Âm* is from page 45a to 96b.

century. In another important Buddhist text called *Source of Buddhist Teachings* (道教源流 *Đạo Giáo Nguyên Lưu*), Phúc Điền promoted this collection as sacred as a Buddhist scripture by calling it the *Sūtra of the Essays on Emptiness* (課虛經 *Khóa Hư Kinh*). Perhaps, Phúc Điền's identification of the *Essays* with a Buddhist sūtra is because the *Procedure*, a repentance ritual, might have been used in Buddhist temples, or because the collection was tied to the name of Trần Thái Tông, a famous Buddhist king of the Trần dynasty. Vietnamese translators including Thiều Chửu and Nguyễn Đăng Thục also treat the *Essays* as a Buddhist sūtra.<sup>233</sup>

There is a *Preface to the Procedure* in *Edition 1* between Fascicle One and Fascicle Two of the *Essays* that is not found in *Edition 2*. This preface is not listed in the table of contents of *Edition 1* and is missing the Nôm interpretation of Tuệ Tĩnh like the other parts of the *Essays*. Possibly, this *Preface to the Procedure* was added later by the copyist. Regardless of some other differences in their subtitles (see Appendix A), the contents and structures of the *Essays* in both editions are quite consistent. Their structures are as follows:

Fascicle One:

- The Four Mountains: *Chants on the Four Mountains, the First Mountain*  
(beginning with an essay and ending with the verses on that mountain), *the*

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<sup>233</sup> Thiều Chửu, *Khóa-Hư Kinh*, 13: “Nguyên văn chữ Hán là Khóa Hư Lục, cứ ngu ý dịch giả thì bộ sách này quyền trên thuyết rõ cái sắc thân người ta là giả là không, người ta ở đời phải chịu bốn nỗi: Sinh, già, ốm, chết như núi như bể, phải biết trông gương các bậc tiên triết mà tu, mới mong thoát khỏi: Quyền giữa quyền dưới thì dạy đủ các phép sám hối tu trì, thực là một bộ kinh cứu khổ cho đời, trong kho sách Phật nước nhà, có lẽ bộ này là hoàn toàn đặc sắc hơn cả, cho nên dịch giả định kêu là kinh Khóa Hư thì có lẽ hay hơn.”

Nguyễn Đăng Thục writes in his introduction to the translation of the *Essays* of Thích Thanh Kiểm. See Thích, *Khóa Hư Lục*, 5: “Bộ sách này có thể gọi là Kinh ‘Khóa Hư’ vì là cả một đời thực nghiệm về chân lý sinh tồn của tác giả.”

*Second Mountain, the Third Mountain, and the Fourth Mountain* (the three later verses share the same structure with *the First Mountain*).

- *A Universal Lecture on the Form-Body*, and
- *An Essay on the Encouragement for the Arising of the Bodhi-Mind*.

Between Fascicle One and Fascicle Two, the *Edition 1* provides the *Preface of the Procedure* with a note, “compiled by the First Patriarch of the Trần dynasty” 陳朝第一祖筆撰.<sup>234</sup> Fascicle Two and Fascicle Three are the body text of the *Procedure*.

Fascicle Two:

- *Admonition Verses at the Time of Tiger, The Morning Incense Praise, The Incense Offering Verses, The Flower Offering Verses, Initiation [to the Buddhas], Repentance of the Transgressions Committed Through the Eye Faculty, Wholehearted Exhorting, Wholehearted Rejoicing (being moved at the sight of good deeds), Wholehearted Merit Transferring, Wholehearted Vow Making, and The Morning Impermanence Verses*.
- *The Midday Incense Praise* and the other items are the same as the previous section. However, the content is about the repentance of the transgressions committed through the ear faculty. It ends with the *Impermanence Verses of This Time (Midday)*.
- *The Sundown Incense Praise* and the other items are as in the previous section; except, the content is about the repentance of the transgressions committed

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<sup>234</sup> This line might have caused Thiều Chửu’s confusion of the authorship of the *Essays*. The “First Patriarch of the Trần dynasty” often makes people think of King Trần Nhân Tông, the First Patriarch of the Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in the thirteenth century, who was also the grandson of Trần Thái Tông, the author of the *Essays*.

through the nose faculty. It is also ended by the *Verses on Impermanence in the Evening*.

Fascicle Three:

- *The Evening Admonition to the Saṅgha Verses*,
- *The Eight Types of Suffering Verses*,
- *The Evening Incense Praise* and the other items are in order as the previous section. The content is about the repentance of the transgressions committed through the tongue faculty. The *Impermanence Verses of This Time (Evening)* is placed at the end.
- *The Midnight Incense Praise* and the other items are as in the previous section. This part is on the repentance of the transgression committed through the body faculty.
- *The Dawn Incense Praise* and the other items are repeated instead of the repentance. This part is on the repentance of the transgressions committed through the mind faculty. It ends with the *Impermanence Verse of This Time (Dawn)*, and
- *The Admonition to the Saṅgha Verses*.

At the end of *Edition 1*, there is an anonymous afterword which might have been added later as well. The above overview of the contents and structures of the *Essays* in *Edition 1* and *Edition 2* suggests some notable points. First, there are several layers of *Edition 1* in which the *Preface to the Procedure* might have been added later by the copyist or someone before, as it lacks the Nôm interpretation of Tuệ Tĩnh and the table of contents of this edition fails to mention it. Second, the Fascicle Two and Fascicle Three

of the two editions include the body text of the *Procedure* which occupy most of the content and the length of the *Essays*. In the Vietnamese Buddhist context, a Buddhist text became a sūtra when it was used as a manual for a ritual. This is the case of the *Procedure* when it became a repentance ritual and was used for daily practice. This is one of the reasons why some Vietnamese Buddhists and scholars have considered the *Essays* as a Buddhist sūtra. Third, the Nôm interpretations and commentaries of Tuệ Tĩnh and Phúc Điền indicate the popular circulation of *Edition 1* and *Edition 2* of the *Essays* among Vietnamese Buddhists. Despite some differences in subtitles, the contents, and structures of the two editions are consistent, which represents the three-fascicle version of the *Essays*.

## 2. The Two-fascicle Extant Edition

The extant two-fascicle edition of the *Essays* is also known as the Tuệ Hiền edition (hereafter referred to as *Edition 3*). This edition was named after Venerable Tuệ Hiền of Hoa Yên Buddhist Temple, who reprinted the collection. Vietnamese Buddhists and scholars have known of this edition due to the discovery of the woodblocks of the *Essays* at Quất Tụ Buddhist Temple in 1867 under the reign of King Tự Đức of the Nguyễn Dynasty (r. 1847-1883).

There are two printed copies of *Edition 3* in the SNI (A. 2013) and in the NLV (R. 37). The first printed edition of *Edition 3* was done in 1883. The Northern Vietnamese Buddhist Association and the *École française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO) in Hanoi reprinted it in 1943. The reprinted version from 1943 is also called the *Reprinted Version of Vietnamese Buddhist Collections* (*Việt Nam Phật Điển Tùng San*) and it circulated

broadly in Vietnam and abroad. Both versions were entitled *The Essays on Emptiness Compiled by Trần Thái Tông* (陳太宗御製課虛 *Trần Thái Tông Ngự Chế Khoá Hư*).

*Edition 3* provides several important pieces of information regarding the circulation of the *Essays* before 1883 in its *Reprinted Afterword* (重刊後引 *Trùng san hậu dẫn*). Firstly, *Edition 3* mentions another edition of the *Essays* that was engraved and printed at Đống Cao Buddhist Temple of Bắc Ninh Province in the nineteenth century. The Đống Cao edition was based on the previous three-fascicle editions of the *Essays*. Secondly, the discovery of Thích Tuệ Hiền's woodblocks of the *Essays* at Hoa Yên Buddhist Temple in 1867 introduces another eighteen documents that are missing from the previous editions of the *Essays* (*Edition 1*, *Edition 2*, and the Đống Cao edition). Thirdly, *Edition 3* rearranges the structure of the *Essays* into two fascicles instead of three fascicles as in *Edition 1* and *Edition 2* and possibly in the Đống Cao edition. Fascicle One of *Edition 3* includes Fascicle One of *Edition 1* and *Edition 2* and the extra eighteen documents of Thích Tuệ Hiền's woodblocks of Hoa Yên Buddhist Temple.

The list of these extra documents is as follows.

- i. *Essay on the Precept of [Non-]Killing* (戒殺生文 *Giới Sát Sinh Văn*)
- ii. *Essay on the Precept of [Non-]Stealing* (戒偷盜[文] *Giới Thâu Đạo [Văn]*)
- iii. *Essay on the Precept of [Non-]Committing Adultery* (戒色文 *Giới Sắc Văn*)
- iv. *Essay on the Precept of [Non-]Lying* (戒妄語文 *Giới Vọng Ngữ Văn*)
- v. *Essay on the Precept of [Non-]Taking the Intoxicants* (戒酒文 *Giới Tửu Văn*)
- vi. *Treatise on Precepts, Contemplation, and Wisdom* (戒定慧論 *Giới Định Tuệ Luận*)
- vii. *Treatise on Ordination* (受戒論 *Thụ Giới Luận*)
- viii. *Treatise on the Recitation of the Buddha's Name* (念佛論 *Niệm Phật Luận*)
- ix. *Treatise on Meditation Practices* (坐禪論 *Toạ Thiền Luận*)
- x. *Treatise on Examples of the Wisdom Teaching* (慧教鑑論 *Tuệ Giáo Giám Luận*)
- xi. *Preface to the Guide to Thiền Buddhism* (禪宗指南序 *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam Tự*)

- xii. *Preface to the Vajrasamādhī Sūtra* (金剛三昧經序 *Kim Cang Tam Muội Kinh Tự*)
- xiii. *Preface to the Procedure* (六時懺悔科儀序 *Lục Thời Sám Hối Khoa Nghi Tự*)
- xiv. *Preface to the Equal Ritual of the Repentance Texts* (平等禮懺文序 *Bình Đẳng Lễ Sám Văn Tự*)
- xv. *Universal Lecture on the Advanced [Transcendent] Path* (普說向上一路 *Phổ Thuyết Hướng Thượng Nhất Lộ*)
- xvi. *Recorded Sayings between the Master and his Disciples* (語錄問答門下 *Ngữ Lục Vấn Đáp Môn Hạ*)
- xvii. *Verses on Remembrance and Recitation* (念訟偈 *Niệm tụng kệ*)
- xviii. *Afterword* (跋後 *Bạt Hậu*)

Fascicle Two of *Edition 3* consists of the body text of the *Procedure*. In other words, Fascicle Two of the *Edition 3* is a combination of Fascicle Two and Fascicle Three in *Edition 1* and *Edition 2* of the *Essays*. It would be better if *Edition 3* moved the *Preface to the Procedure* to the end of Fascicle One, which is right before the body text of the ritual. In such a manner, the contents and structures of the *Essays* would become more coherent.

In this dissertation, I take *Edition 3* as the primary source because it is the latest edition of the *Essays* and includes the eighteen extra documents in comparison to the other two previous editions. The structures and contents in the three extant editions of the *Essays* suggest a wide range of Trần Thái Tông's religious ideas and practices. In summary, I divide the *Essays* into three parts based on different methods of Buddhist practices. The first part includes *Chants on the Four Mountains* and the *Universal Lecture on the Form-Body*. This part emphasizes the basic teaching of Buddhism regarding the insecurity and impermanence of the physical body. The second part consists of the essays on exhortation such as the *Essay on the Encouragement for the Arising of the Bodhi-Mind* and the *Universal Lecture on the Advanced [Transcendent] Path*. The third part covers different methods of Buddhist practices that encompass the

three aspects: precepts (*sīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*). This part has five essays on the five precepts for the laity, the *Treatise on Ordination*, the *Treatise on Precepts, Contemplation, and Wisdom*, the *Treatise on Recitation of the Buddha's Name*, the *Treatise on Meditation Practices*, and the *Treatise on Examples of the Wisdom Teaching*. These essays introduce a gradual practice that blends the practical methods of Pure Land school with meditation practices. The second group in this part includes the essays that emphasize the “sudden enlightenment” teaching of Chan/Thiền Buddhism, such as the *Preface to the Guide to Thiền Buddhism*, the *Preface to the Vajrasamādhi Sūtra*, the *Recorded Sayings between the Master and his Disciples*, and the *Verses on Remembrance and Recitation*. In addition, there is another group of compositions related to the repentance practices. They contain the *Preface to the Equal Ritual of the Repentance Texts*, the *Preface to the Procedure*, and the *Procedure*. From a glance at the contents of the *Essays*, we have seen a syncretic tendency of Trần Thái Tông towards Buddhist teachings and practices. His concern broadly includes the training of Buddhist precepts, different forms of repentance practices, Pure Land and meditative contemplation, the studies of Buddhist scriptures, and investigation of the Chan genres of literature. Such a tendency thus echoes with the Vietnamese syncretic Buddhism in general.

In the framework of the *Essays*, the *Procedure* has an important position as it occupies one half of the length of the collection. In addition, the contents of other essays such as *Chants on the Four Mountains*, the *Universal Lecture on the Form-Body*, essays on the five precepts and the *Treatise on Precepts* closely relate to the idea of repentance by means of six sense faculties as mainly concerned in the *Procedure*. While the contents



and structures of the *Essays* have changed in the three extant editions, the *Preface to the Procedure* has been lost and found over time, yet the content of the *Procedure* has remained in good condition. This suggests an awareness of the *Procedure* among Vietnamese Buddhists for which some Vietnamese Buddhists and scholars have promoted the *Essays* to be a Buddhist sūtra or a ritualized work of Vietnamese Buddhism.

## II. Vietnamese Translations

Recognizing the significance of the *Essays*, Vietnamese Buddhists and scholars have translated and annotated the collection into the modern Vietnamese writing system (*chữ quốc ngữ*) since the 1930s, and thus it has become more accessible and widespread to the public. In seven decades, there were eight different Vietnamese translations of the *Essays* based on the *Edition 2* and *Edition 3* of the *Essays* that we have discussed earlier. Such an engagement in translating and annotating the King's collection has determined the historical and literary value of the *Essays* among the Vietnamese extant Buddhist texts. Some of the translations by Buddhist monks, especially the Vietnamese translation of Thích Thanh Từ, have served the purpose of promoting the practices of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect of the Trần dynasty. In other words, the blooming of Vietnamese translations of the *Essays* in the twentieth century denotes a new stage of textual development of the King's collection. When committing to the translation work, each translator once again has reviewed the extant primary texts, and has rearranged the structure of the *Essays* to make it more coherent and systematic.

Based on the approach and purpose of the translation works, I have sorted the eight Vietnamese translations of the *Essays* into three groups. The first group includes translations by Vietnamese scholars who have emphasized the language and literary

aspects of the *Essays*. These are the annotated translation of Đào Duy Anh (1974) and the translation of the scholars of the Institute of Literature (Viện Văn Học) including Nguyễn Đức Vân, Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Trần Thị Băng Thanh and Đỗ Văn Hỷ. The publication of Viện Văn Học was a part of the TVLT project in 1977.<sup>235</sup> Trần Thị Băng Thanh then produced her own translation of the *Essays* in the publication of the *Collection of Vietnamese Literature (Tổng Tập Văn Học Việt Nam)* in 1997. The second group contains translations by Buddhist monks and practitioners who have promoted the religious aspect of the *Essays*. They are the translations of Thích Thanh Kiểm (1992), Thích Thanh Từ (1996), and some uncompleted translations of the *Essays* are also found elsewhere in the writings of Thích Nhất Hạnh, and Đỗ Nhuận. The third group is the hybrid of the two aforementioned groups, where the translations cover both the literary and religious aspects of the *Essays*. They consist of translations of Thiều Chửu (1934, reprinted in 1961),<sup>236</sup> Nguyễn Đăng Thục (1972), and Lê Mạnh Thát (2004). In brief, the eight Vietnamese translations of the *Essays* demonstrate the popularity of the collection on both professional and practical levels.

In the first group, the translation of Viện Văn Học was published in the second volume of the TVLT series and represents a milestone in the study of the *Essays*. This Vietnamese translation is a painstaking work done by a group of scholars in which each

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<sup>235</sup> This series was the most important project of the collection and translation of extant texts of medieval Vietnam. This project had started in 1960s by the Hán-Nôm team of Viện Văn Học led by Nguyễn Đức Vân and Đào Phương Bình. This was a decade-long national group project that was undertaken by scholars. Hence, it has had authority among Vietnamese scholarship up to the present day.

<sup>236</sup> Nguyễn Trọng Thuật offered an expository note on the *Essays* in *Nam Phong Journal* 189 (October 1933). This was the earliest writing related to the *Essays* in the twentieth century. In this writing, Nguyễn Trọng Thuật introduced its author, editions, and a basic philosophy of the text. He translated a poem by the King at the end of the writing which was not a translation of the *Essays*. See Nguyễn, “Khóa Hư.” Lê Mạnh Thát mistakes it as the first translation of the *Essays* into Vietnamese language. See Lê, *Trần Thái Tông*, 321.

scholar worked on certain parts of the collection. The chief editors (Nguyễn Đức Vân and Nguyễn Huệ Chi) have evaluated the final work. The later translation of Trần Thị Băng Thanh (1997) is generally based on the translation of Viện Văn Học since she participated in the TVLT project. Regardless of some shortcomings, the translation of the *Essays* conducted by Viện Văn Học has been a rich and reliable Vietnamese translation up to the present day.

One of the noticeable contributions of this translation is the close reading and comparison of the three extant editions of the *Essays*. This meticulous task would save significant time and effort for later translators in terms of grasping the meaning of the primary text. The translation also provides the primary text in handwriting, the Vietnamese transliteration, and annotations of Buddhist terms, idioms, expressions, and religious concepts. However, the translation of Viện Văn Học contains some deficiencies. There are incorrect Chinese characters here and there, possibly due to neglect in the handwriting task. More importantly, the explanation of Buddhist terms, expressions, and religious concepts in the annotations is not quite convincing. These have been appropriately corrected in later annotations and translations of the *Essays* by the Vietnamese Buddhist monks.

The translation of Đào Duy Anh in 1974 is impressive. Đào Duy Anh conducts three important tasks. First, he provides a Vietnamese translation and annotation of *Khóa Hư Quốc Âm* of Phúc Điền (*Edition 2*). Second, Đào Duy Anh makes his own translation of the *Essays* based on *Edition 3* of the text and a close reading of the previous translation

of Thiền Chửu.<sup>237</sup> Third, this translation gives suggestive corrections for the original text in both editions (*Edition 2* and *Edition 3*). The endnote section was meticulous, with three hundred and sixty-eight notes, providing more detail than any previous translation of the *Essays*. In addition, Đào Duy Anh writes a chapter introducing Vietnamese Thiền Buddhism of the Trần dynasty and translates some parts of the *Recorded Sayings of Tuệ Trung Thụ* (*Tuệ Trung Thụ Ngữ Lục*) in the Appendix of the work. These extra writings provide an understanding of the language and style of literary works such as the *Essays* and other Buddhist texts of the Trần dynasty.

In the second group, the translation of Thích Thanh Từ is the most well-known among the Vietnamese Buddhist communities due to his efforts to revive the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect in the late twentieth century.<sup>238</sup> Originally, Thích Thanh Từ reads, translates, and makes his comments on the primary text. After that, he gives lectures based on his Vietnamese translation and interpretation. His disciples recorded the lectures, transcribed, edited, and published them so that many others would be able to access the *Essays*. Therefore, Thích Thanh Từ's translation is generally presented in colloquial language. Meanwhile, the translation of Thích Thanh Kiểm is quite succinct and follows the parallel style of the primary text. Audiences of this translation are Buddhist monastics who have had sufficient understanding of Buddhist terms and concepts and are comfortable with the old-fashioned literary style of Buddhist texts.

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<sup>237</sup> In some notes, Đào Duy Anh states how Thiền Chửu translates the terms or follows the translation of Thiền Chửu. See note 10 (p. 202), note 33 (p. 203), note 41 (p. 205), note 9 (p. 211), note 64 (p. 217).

<sup>238</sup> Recently, Loan Thuy Nguyen has completed a PhD Dissertation entitled "New Buddhist Movements and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Vietnam" in which she discussed this revival movement of Thích Thanh Từ and his school as they align with the rise of Buddhist modernism that occurred globally.

In the hybrid group, each translation makes its own unique contribution. The translation of Thiều Chửu is the earliest translation based on *Edition 2* of the *Essays*. The work of Thiều Chửu looks like a manual of the *Essays*. It starts with the primary text, followed by Vietnamese transliteration, and then translation of Thiều Chửu. There is no commentary on the *Essays* except a short preface written by the translator. In this preface, Thiều Chửu initiates a debate on the authorship of the *Essays*. He believes that the *Essays* were composed by Trần Nhân Tông instead of Trần Thái Tông despite the fact that the name of Trần Thái Tông is written on the three extant editions of the *Essays*.

Thiều Chửu explains his reasons and writes a short biography of Trần Nhân Tông after translating the *Preface to the Essays* written by Nguyễn Thận Hiên. This judgment possibly originated from the idea that the *Essays* was a text of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect. Therefore, according to Thiều Chửu, the *Essays* should be written by the First Patriarch of this school, namely Trần Nhân Tông. The debate on authorship of the *Essays* is not lengthy, and the historical facts as mentioned in the *Essays* do actually match with the biography of Trần Thái Tông.<sup>239</sup> The debate on the authorship of the *Essays* is valuable as a means of pushing Vietnamese scholars to continue to look for more historical evidence in order to substantiate their arguments and citations.

Another translation belonging to this group is the 1972 translation of Nguyễn Đăng Thục. This translator goes a step further and also authors a second book entitled *Thiền Teachings of Trần Thái Tông (Thiền Học Trần Thái Tông)* along with the translation of the *Essays*. Therefore, it is better to read both works together for a better understanding of Trần Thái Tông's religious ideas and practices. In the *Thiền Teachings*

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<sup>239</sup> Nguyễn Đăng Thục makes a critical comment toward this issue in his study and translation of the *Essays* four decades later. He asserts that Thiều Chửu's idea regarding the authorship of the *Essays* was "absurd and vague." See Nguyễn, *Thiền học*, 41-42.

of *Trần Thái Tông*, Nguyễn Đăng Thục analyzes different dimensions of the *Essays* such as Thiền philosophy and poetry, the Three Teachings, ethics and metaphysics, religious and cosmological perspectives.

The translation of Nguyễn Đăng Thục has some improvements over that of Thiều Chửu. He rearranges the structure of the primary text by placing the *Preface to the Procedure*, the *Preface to the Equal Rituals of the Repentance Texts*, and the *Procedure* in Fascicle Two of the *Essays* while the other essays are grouped together in Fascicle One. The translation follows the original text. The improvement offered by this translation is its citation section in which Nguyễn Đăng Thục explains the meanings of Buddhist terms, expressions, and religious concepts. By means of this translation and the book *Thiền Teachings of Trần Thái Tông*, Nguyễn Đăng Thục is successful in drawing the interests and curiosities of Vietnamese monastics and scholars toward the *Essays* and in explaining its significance in Vietnamese Buddhist literature.

Lê Mạnh Thát provides a translation of the *Essays* in his complete study of Trần Thái Tông and his works. His translation is based on the translation of Viện Văn Học in TVLT. Due to a variety of Vietnamese translations of the *Essays* and the length of his book, Lê Mạnh Thát reduced the volume of annotations and explanations of Buddhist terms and religious concepts that appear in the *Essays*. In addition, Lê Mạnh Thát provides the original edition of the *Essays* and other writings of Trần Thái Tông. There are some repetitions of previous translations, yet the Vietnamese language in this translation is more readable.

For further studies of the *Essays*, one should peruse the translations of Viện Văn Học, Lê Mạnh Thát and Thích Thanh Từ at least. The three translations cover different

aspects of the *Essays*. The translation of Viện Văn Học provides a helpful comparison of the three extant editions of the primary text, while Lê Mạnh Thát's translation offers rich historical material, and the translation language is refined; the translation of Thích Thanh Từ helps one to understand the Buddhist teachings throughout the text.

In summary, the flourishing of different translations of the *Essays* into Vietnamese language brings a new life to an important and longstanding collections of Buddhist writings. Those translations have served either academic or religious purposes and have circulated among Vietnamese scholars, monastics, and even lay practitioners. Each translation has its own strengths and weaknesses as I have described above. In fact, the translations themselves have their own textual development which help to position the *Essays* in the modern context of Vietnamese Buddhism.

## Chapter Five:

### Annotated Translation of the *Procedure*

This chapter includes the primary text and a complete translation of the *Procedure* and its preface. Subtitles and diacritics are added for better comprehension of the structure of the work. The translation is based on a close reading of the three editions of the *Essays*, and the three respective versions of the three editions of the *Essays* as noted are *Edition 1* (AB. 268), *Edition 2* (R. 1200), and *Edition 3* (R. 37). The task of identifying and comparing different editions of the text is a core component of the project. It can be noted that *Edition 1* contains more variants of words in comparison with the other two editions; however, these variants do not make any significant change to the meaning of the text.

#### I. Preface

六時懺悔科儀序 <sup>240</sup>

<sup>241</sup>利川陸之來往者。舟車也。滌身心之塵垢 <sup>242</sup>者。禮懺也。欲滌身心 <sup>243</sup>而不以禮懺。則何異於欲利來往而不以舟車者乎。是知禮懺其用大矣。故大集經云。如百年垢衣。可於一日澣令鮮淨。如是百千劫中所集諸不善業。以佛力故。善順思惟。可於一日一時盡能消滅也 <sup>244</sup>。

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<sup>240</sup>*Edition 1*: 六時禮佛懺悔儀序 *Lục Thời Lễ Phật Sám Hối Nghi Tự*

<sup>241</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 夫 *phù*

<sup>242</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 也 *dã*

<sup>243</sup>*Edition 1*: 塵垢 *trần cấu*

<sup>244</sup> *Edition 1*: Strike 也 *dã*



且夫衆生於本來覺性清淨圓明。湛若太虛。一塵不立。由妄洵瞥起穢土現成。能所兩依。佛我雙計。性根枝別。愚智岐分。示之一門。難以悟人。故我佛弘大智願開方便門。隨路指歸。應病與<sup>245</sup>藥。知其衆生幻垢從妄而生。勸令一念精處歸依禮懺。使身心清淨灑<sup>246</sup>裸依前。風息波澄。垢除鏡<sup>247</sup>徹。何者。前心惡依如覆月雲。後心善生如消暗炬。噫禮懺之用爲大。豈其然乎。

朕荷工天之眷。享至尊之位。民事艱難。國政繁夥。紛華誘於外。嗜欲蠱於內。口厭滋味。身掛金珠。視聽役於<sup>248</sup>色聲。居處安於臺榭。又況世序澆漓。人法衰末。學者頑瞽<sup>249</sup>。羸<sup>250</sup>薄善根。日則根塵紛觸業網拘牽。夜則睡蓋蔽<sup>251</sup>覆。懶結纏縛。日夜攀緣。莫<sup>252</sup>非構禍。招釁之咎。朕以是事。載之于懷。悲感集交<sup>253</sup>。餐寢忘廢<sup>254</sup>。以聽政之餘暇。徧閱<sup>255</sup>經論<sup>256</sup>及諸儀文。撰集<sup>257</sup>自利利他之

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<sup>245</sup> *Edition 1*: 施 *thi*

<sup>246</sup> *Edition 1*: 洗 *tẩy*

<sup>247</sup> *Edition 1*: 景 *cảnh*

<sup>248</sup> *Edition 1*: 于 *vu*

<sup>249</sup> *Edition 1*: 瞽 *miết*

<sup>250</sup> *Edition 1 and Edition 3*: 羸 *luy*

<sup>251</sup> *Edition 1*: 夢 *mông*

<sup>252</sup> *Edition 1*: 無 *vô*

<sup>253</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 并 *trinh*

<sup>254</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 故 *cố*

<sup>255</sup> *Edition 1*: 集 *tập*

<sup>256</sup> *Edition 1*: 藏 *tạng*

<sup>257</sup> *Edition 1*: 期得 *kỳ đắc*

法。以示於人。尋而思之念<sup>258</sup>之。積有業者盡是六根所造。是以釋迦文佛未成道時。先入雪山六年苦行。蓋爲六根故也。因放其意。以六根分爲六時。一時禮懺一根。親製其儀文。目之曰六時禮佛懺悔科儀。文則文繁。言則言遠。<sup>259</sup>但文繁則懺悔。言遠則疑生。故不構於<sup>260</sup>浮詞。假盈卷軸。使讀誦者皆欣。聞見者易悟。庶幾有信之徒。能於日夜發至誠心。以此科儀爲所禮懺者。是不負朕之所志自利利他之願也。後之明眼者。毋以儀文見笑。然雖如是。不因紫陌華開早。爭得黃鶯下柳條。

**Preface to the Procedure and Protocol of Performing Repentance Throughout the Six Divisions of the Day<sup>261</sup>**

It is practical to travel on river by boat, and on land by [ground] vehicle. Performing repentance [is the method] to clean ourselves and to purify our mind. If [we] desire to wash our body and to purify our mind without performing repentance, this would be no different than moving without a boat or a [ground] vehicle. Therefore, [in this way we] know how great and helpful the performance of repentance practice can be. The *Mahāsaṃghāta Sūtra* states: “It would be as if a dirty hundred-year-old garment could be washed clean in one day.” Hence, all sorts of unwholesome karmas, which are

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<sup>258</sup> *Edition 1 and Edition 2*: 人 人

<sup>259</sup> *Edition 1*: 文則不繁人言則不遠 文 不 繁 人 言 不 遠

<sup>260</sup> *Edition 1*: Strike 構於 構 於

<sup>261</sup> Originally, the *Preface to the Procedure and Protocol of Performing Repentance Throughout the Six Divisions of the Day* was not listed right before the body text itself and in some cases, it was discarded. In *Edition 1*, the compiler placed this preface in between the first and second fascicle. In *Edition 2* and *Edition 3*, it is in the first fascicle. For the consistency of the text, I translate and place it before the body text of the *Procedure*.

collected through a hundred thousand kalpas, could be eradicated in a day or in a moment by the power of the Buddha and our wholesome thoughts.

Furthermore, the original [and] awakened nature of sentient beings is tranquil and perfectly luminous. It is serene like the sky without a speck of dust, but because of a reckless bubble that appears at a glance,<sup>262</sup> an impure land comes to exist; [this unfolds] a mutual dependence between subject(s) and object(s),<sup>263</sup> and dual calculation of [differentiations between] Buddha and self.<sup>264</sup> Hence, there are differences between nature and the appearance of things as well as a differentiation between wisdom and ignorance. Even if [the Buddha] shows the Universal Gate to enter, it would be hard for us to all follow [that path] together. Our Buddha has established great vows of excellent wisdom and opened wide the gate of skillful means. This shows a way back home in accordance with one's own path or gives a proper cure in accordance with one's own sickness. Having known that all mental formations and defilements of sentient beings are made from delusion, [the Buddha] therefore urges us to take refuge [in the Three Jewels] and to repent wholeheartedly, so that our bodies and minds would purify to the point of original stainlessness. When the wind ceases, the wave calms, dust is wiped out; then the mirror is clean. Why? Because the former unwholesome mind arises as if the moon is

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<sup>262</sup> Mahāyāna scriptures and Chan/Thiền texts state that all sentient beings have equal awakening minds equal to those of the enlightened ones. It is called “the original mind” (本心 *bổn tâm*) meaning that all sentient being could have attained Buddhahood one day if they continue to cultivate the manner of the Arhats, Bodhisattvas or previous Buddhas.

<sup>263</sup> Subjects and objects (能所 *năng sở*) refer to persons/things that have the ability to transform and be transformed. For example, the eye is the subject (能 *năng*), and the form or appearance of external objects that makes contact with the eye is the object (所 *sở*).

<sup>264</sup> This relates to the concept of non-duality in Mahāyāna Buddhism. This concept claims that there is no ultimate difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, ignorance and enlightenment, or a Buddha and a sentient being.

covered by clouds, but when the latter wholesome mind appears, it is like a torch causing darkness to disappear. Oh, how great and useful repentance practice is! That's it!

I have received the grace of Heaven, enjoyed a supreme position. I have been over-burdened and challenged with civil and state affairs. Outside temptations and inside sensual desires drive me crazy. I dislike all tasty foods and am bored by all kinds of jewelry. My eyes and ears are the servants of forms and sounds. I have lived in luxurious palaces. So too, the way of this world is ungrateful, and human behavior is more corrupt. The learned ones are stubborn and undiscerning. People disdain virtuous and wholesome deeds. In the daytime, our [six] sense faculties contact and entwine with [the six] external objects, becoming entangled by a karmic net. At night, we are obscured by the hindrances of sloth and torpor, then chained by laziness. Day and night, we keep interacting in such ways that cause us trouble and harm or invite misfortune. I have always kept these thoughts in mind, often feel sad and disturbed, so much that I do not feel like eating or sleeping. In my leisure time after resolving state affairs, I frequently read the [Buddhist] sūtras, treatises, and rites to collect and compile a ritual manual useful for myself and for others, imparting it to them as well. I then searched and pondered over them again, to make sure that all karmas collected are completely [generated] from the six sense faculties. That's why, before Shakyamuni Buddha attained Buddhahood, he had to spend six years practicing ascetism in the Himalayas: because of the six sense faculties. In so doing, I have used the six sense faculties to divide [the ritual] into six units of repentance practice in accordance with each sense faculty. I have written this repentance ritual and called it the *Procedure and Protocol of Performing Repentance Throughout the Six Divisions of the Day*. The more I write, the more my writings become redundant. The

more I talk, the more my words would deviate from the true meaning. If my words are too complicated, people would be [burdened], and too lazy to apply my method into [their] practice. If the meaning is unclear, people start to doubt. Therefore, I would not fill the book with ornate or flowery words. Yet [I would like] the people who read and recite [the rituals] to be happy, and that those who see and listen will understand easily. By doing so, [Buddhist] believers or followers would sincerely generate a wholehearted mind; thereby they would take this ritual as a repentance method. Thus, it would be in line with my goodwill of “helping myself and helping other people.” Those from later generations who have bright eyes must not disparage the language of this ritual. Regardless of being like this, it is thus:

Flowers blossom early not because of the purple path,  
But because of the orioles perching on the willow branches.

## II. The Body Text

### 1. The Morning Repentance: For the Eye Faculty<sup>265</sup>

寅時警策衆偈

暘谷明將啟。漫漫黑地開。

觸心塵競起。眩目色爭排。

臭殼休貪抱。埋頭早願擡。

慙懃專六念。次得契方來。<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> I added subtitles for each section of repentance throughout the text. Following that, each section accords with the repentance ritual on each sense faculty, i.e., eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

<sup>266</sup> There is no difference in variant editions of the *Essays*.

***Admonition to the Saṅgha Verses at the Time of Tiger*<sup>267</sup>**

The sun is about to shine brightly.

The darkness of the earth is slowly illuminated.

Mind is clinging to all sorts of external objects.

Eyes are dazzled with colors in muddle.

Without a desire to cherish the foul body.

But having a will of lifting the buried head.

Solicitously contemplating on the six-fold remembrances,<sup>268</sup>

we then may obtain the truth to come.

禮三寶

(初入道場時咒嚴淨已。方禮三寶。或三拜。或九拜。或十五拜隨宜。)

南無盡虛空遍法界。十方三世一切常住佛陀耶尊。

南無盡虛空遍法界。十方三世一切常住達摩耶藏。

南無盡虛空遍法界。十方三世一切常住僧伽耶眾。

***Homage to the Three Jewels***

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<sup>267</sup> The Time of Tiger is the interval between 3-5 am. In pre-modern history, Vietnam used the lunar calendar and Chinese twelve-hour way of dividing periods of time in a day. This twelve-hour system was named in accordance with the twelve Chinese zodiac animals: Rat (11pm-1am), Ox (1am-3am), Tiger (3am-5am), Cat (5am-7am), Dragon (7am-9am), Snake (9am-11am), Horse (11am-1pm), Goat (1pm-3pm), Monkey (3pm-5pm), Rooster (5pm-7pm), Dog (7pm-9pm), and Pig (9pm-11pm). In the lunar calendar that has been used in China, the fifth zodiac animal is Rabbit, instead of the Cat that is used in the Vietnamese lunar calendar.

<sup>268</sup> Six-fold remembrances 六念, according to *Dīrghāgama* (T. no. 1, vol. 1, p.012a14, include remembrance of (1) Buddha, (2) Dharma, (3) Saṅgha, (4) Precepts, (5) Almsgiving, and (6) Heaven. The Buddhist lay devotees have practiced six-fold remembrances so that they would be reborn in heavenly realms after death.

(After entering the Buddha's altar, the attendant recites *dhāraṇī* to purify the place, then pays homage to the Three Jewels, making either 3 bows, 9 bows, or 15 bows).

Homage to all the eternally dwelling and honorable Buddhas of the three periods and ten directions to the ends of empty space in all Dharma realms.

Homage to all the eternally dwelling Dharma of the three periods and ten directions to the ends of empty space in all Dharma realms.

Homage to all the eternally dwelling Saṅgha of the three periods and ten directions to the ends of empty space in all Dharma realms.

日初 <sup>269</sup>祝香

伏以蟾輪西沒。龍燭東生 <sup>270</sup>。梵筵會清淨之流。空界禮聖賢之衆。欲通檀信。謹爇 <sup>271</sup>寶香。

是香也。種自戒林。灌之 <sup>272</sup>以禪定之水。伐從在苑。削之 <sup>273</sup>以解脫之刀。不猶人力斧斤。自出天然形勢。爇知見之寶篆。結光明之雲臺。飄時滿地清芬。散處普天濃郁。

以今日初。焚香供養。

### ***The Morning Incense Praise***

Submit ourselves and reflect: The moon<sup>274</sup> turns over to the west, the sun<sup>275</sup> rises in the east. On the Brahman mat,<sup>276</sup> the purified ones are gathering; in the realm of

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<sup>269</sup> *Edition 2 and Edition 3:* 初日 *sơ nhật*

<sup>270</sup> *Edition 1:* 升 *thăng*

<sup>271</sup> *Edition 1:* 焚 *phân*

<sup>272</sup> *Edition 1:* Add 必 *tất*

<sup>273</sup> *Edition 1:* Add 必 *tất*

emptiness,<sup>277</sup> the sages are praying. With my sincere mind, I solemnly burn the precious incense [to make an offering].

This incense is organically grown in the moral forest and nourished by the meditative water. It is cut by a liberated knife from the understanding garden. The human physical strength does not use a hammer and a hatchet to cut it, for the plant is grown by itself. [I] light the wisdom incense to produce a brilliant cloudy platform, when the fragrance is permeated everywhere, its smoke scattering evenly over the sky. In this early morning, [I] burn this incense to make an offering.

獻香偈<sup>278</sup>

沉水禪林香馥郁

旃檀慧苑舊栽培

戒刀削就聳山形

爇向心瀟長供養。

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<sup>274</sup> The moon (蟾輪 *thiềm luân*) is an old reference to the legend of the Chang'e fleeing to the moon (嫦娥奔月 *Hằng Nga bôn nguyệt*) in Chinese mythology. She was said to have fled to the moon after stealing an immortal elixir from her husband, Houye (后羿 *Hậu Nghệ*), which was given by the Heavenly Queen of the Western Palace. In an alternative ending to this legend, Chang'e was transformed into an ugly toad by betraying her husband and living in the moon. See Hamilton, "Chang'e."

<sup>275</sup> *Long chúc* 龍燭 refers to the sun.

<sup>276</sup> The Brahman mat refers to the pure seat where monastics are giving Dharma talks. It is also called the Dharma seat.

<sup>277</sup> In this context, the realm of emptiness refers to a Buddhist temple or monastery.

<sup>278</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 雲 *vân*



### *The Incense Offering Verses*

The agarwood<sup>279</sup> from the meditative forest has a permeating scent.

The sandalwood<sup>280</sup> from the discerning garden is cultivated by ages.

The moral knife sharpens [the incense] like the topmost mountain peak.

Burning incense, I wholeheartedly make the offering.

獻花偈<sup>281</sup>

心地開時誇爛熳

諸天雨處讓芬芳

枝七束七獻佛前

億劫業<sup>282</sup>風吹不落。

### *The Flower Offering Verses*

When the mind field opens, flowers flourish colorfully.

The heavenly beings rain fragrant flowers everywhere.

Turning into bouquets of flowers to offer in front of the Buddha.

Millions of kalpas of the karmic wind<sup>283</sup> could not blow them away.

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<sup>279</sup> Agarwood has some variants in Chinese language called *trầm hương* 沉香, *trầm thủy hương* 沉水香 or *thủy trầm hương* 水沉香 which is produced from the *Aquilaria sinensis* tree, which is also called “white wood incense” *bạch mộc hương* 白木香.

<sup>280</sup> Sandalwood is used frequently in Buddhist offerings. The word *chiên đàn* 旃檀 or *đàn hương* 檀香 is the transliteration of Sanskrit word “candana.”

<sup>281</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 雲 vân

<sup>282</sup> *Edition 1*: 塵 trần

<sup>283</sup> This refers to unwholesome karmas. Trần Thái Tông treated unwholesome karmas like wind, which is non-stop and everywhere. In *Preface to the Vajrasamādhi Sūtra* (金剛三昧經序 *Kim Cang Tam Muội Kinh Tự*), Trần Thái Tông wrote: “All sentient beings have been defiled by collective unwholesome

敬啟<sup>284</sup>

十方大覺。三世雄師。揚慧炬於昏衢。泛慈航<sup>285</sup>於苦海。竊聞鷄稠初送。  
兒影方沉。江山之煙霧微分。遠近之輪蹄齊動。樓上梅花聲斷。牕前竹葉醉腥。柳  
眉隱約映朝暉。花面嬌羞凝曉露。逢茲<sup>286</sup>明發。憫彼愚蒙。宵中夢裏既昏七。覺  
後心頭猶擾七。眼耳隨於<sup>287</sup>聲色。鼻舌逐於味香。長爲火宅烹煎。永被愛河沒溺。  
任爾今朝開眼漢。亦如昨夜打眠人。不憂生老病死侵。祇管妻孥財貨<sup>288</sup>縛。

諸佛子<sup>289</sup>。身根不固。命帝難安。凡諸頂上戴天。難免眼光落地。一朝忽  
失手。萬劫難復身。切須早七種善芽。莫自區七(區)求惡果。人人猛省省。箇箇勤  
修。專心禮無上慈容。觸目見大光明藏。但某甲等。謹想之時。以爲日初之禮。

### *Initiation*

[I] respectfully initiate to the great awakened ones in the ten directions,<sup>290</sup> the  
mighty masters of the three time periods.<sup>291</sup> While lighting the lamp of wisdom in the

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karmas for a long time. Besides, their minds have wavered by a storm of experiences from “seeing and understanding.” (*Chúng sanh cứu giao huân nhiễm chi nghiệp tập. Nhiên hữu thức thần mỗi dao tri kiến chi phong ba.* 衆生久膠薰染之業習。然有識神每搖知見之風波。 *Essays*: 31a).

<sup>284</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 文 *văn*

<sup>285</sup> *Edition 1*: 舟 *chu*

<sup>286</sup> *Edition 1*: 茲逢 *tư phùng*

<sup>287</sup> *Edition 1*: 于 *vu*

<sup>288</sup> *Edition 1*: 寶 *bảo*

<sup>289</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 等 *đẳng*

<sup>290</sup> The great awakened ones are Buddhas who achieve ultimate liberation and are believed to teach the Dharma in ten directions (East, West, South, North, Southeast, Southwest, Northeast, Northwest, plus up and down). In Buddhist scriptures, “the ten directions” refers to all Buddhalands in the universe.

darkness, sailing the boat of compassion in the ocean of suffering, I hear the cockcrow just end, the moon<sup>292</sup> is sinking. As the clouds and mists floating over mountains and rivers, carriages and horses set in motion from far and near, [I] hear the sound of plum blossom melody<sup>293</sup> upstairs has finished, and someone has just awaked from the bamboo leaf wine<sup>294</sup> [placed] in front of the window. As the sunshine gleams across the willow-shaped eyebrows, a beautifully bashful face moistened by morning dew, having come across [all these] at the bright morning, [I] feel sympathy for the ignorant. Being in a hazy dream at night, our minds are still disturbed after waking up. Eyes and ears have followed form and sound. Nose and tongue have been in chase of taste and smell. Resign ourselves constantly to blazing in the burning house,<sup>295</sup> perpetually content with drowning in the river of craving.<sup>296</sup> Despite being awake this morning, we are not different from the persons who slept last night. Regardless of approaching the circle of life and death (lit. to be born, to grow old, to get sick, and to die), we only feel concern about family, wealth, and properties.

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<sup>291</sup> The mighty masters of three time periods (or three existences) are the Buddhas of the past, at present, and future. “The Buddhas of the ten directions and three time periods” refers to all Buddhas throughout space and time.

<sup>292</sup> Rabbit shade (兔影 *thố ảnh*) is a literary image that refers to the moon.

<sup>293</sup> The sound of plum blossom melody (梅華聲 *mai hoa thanh*) is possibly the melody of plum blossom (梅花引 *mai hoa dẫn*), an ancient Chinese melody often played by flute.

<sup>294</sup> Bamboo leaf wine (竹葉醉 *trúc diệp túy*) is a kind of wine fermented from small bamboo leaves.

<sup>295</sup> The burning house is a parable in chapter three of *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* (*Lotus Sūtra*). The *Fahua Sanmei Jing* 法華三昧經 (T. no. 269, vol. 9) was one of the earliest versions of *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* translated by Chi Cương Lương Tiếp. Kang Shenghui also cited this Parables Chapter in his *Sūtra of the Parable of Three Vehicles Spoken by the Buddha* (佛說三車喻經 *Phật Thuyết Tam Xa Dụ Kinh*).

<sup>296</sup> River of craving or river of desires (愛河 *ái hà*) is another expression of the *samsāra* world.

Oh Buddhists!<sup>297</sup> The root of the [physical] body is not strong. The source of life is hardly at ease. The sky is all above our head, [however] our vision is unable to avoid falling on the ground.<sup>298</sup> Suddenly an overnight slip takes place, the [human] body is lost for a myriad kalpas. Hence, we should soon plant wholesome seeds, [instead of] only seeking unwholesome consequences. Everyone [should] reflect deeply, and practice diligently. Single-mindedly, I pay homage to the Unsurpassed Compassionate One,<sup>299</sup> as far as the eyes can see, the great brilliant [Buddhist] scriptures.<sup>300</sup> I and all sentient beings sincerely contemplate this time as the early morning's service.

懺悔眼根罪

志心懺悔。臣某<sup>301</sup>等。自從無始無量劫來。失却本心。罔知正道。墮三途苦。由六根非。若不懺前。難追悔後。

眼根業者。惡因熟視。善業冷看。錯認空花。忘窺本月。愛憎競起妍醜爭持。瞥眼妄生。眩於正見。白來青去。紫市是皇非。種七(種)邪觀。何殊盲漢。逢人好色。斜眄偷窺。瞎却未生本來面目。見他財寶。正覷瞪睛。遇彼貧窮。蒙眸不顧。

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<sup>297</sup> All Buddhists 諸佛子 includes Buddhist monastics and lay devotees who believe and practice the Buddha's teachings.

<sup>298</sup> The metaphor of "vision/or eye falls on the ground" (眼光落地 *nhân quang lạc địa*) means death. When sentient beings are alive, the sky is over their heads. Yet they will be buried underground after their death.

<sup>299</sup> The Unsurpassed Compassionate One 無上慈容 is one way of referring to the Buddha.

<sup>300</sup> That "the great brilliant (Buddhist) scriptures" is a possible translation of 大光明藏 (*đại quang minh tạng*) in this context. The act of paying homage to the Buddha, then to his Dharma, and to the Buddhist Saṅgha is repeated in Buddhist rituals. In this recitation, Trần Thái Tông omitted the last one. Thích Thanh Từ interpreted it as the pure and brilliant nature of original minds of sentient beings. See Thích, *Khóa Hư Lục Giảng Giải*, 140.

<sup>301</sup> Edition 1: 某甲 *mỗ giáp*

他家死喪。乾<sup>302</sup>泪無痕。親眷傷亡。潸然泣血。或見三寶。或入伽藍。近像對經。畧無瞻視。佛堂僧舍。男女相逢。眼去眉來。迷荒色慾。不敬護法。不畏龍神。極目貪歡。曾無俛首。

如斯等罪。無量無邊。從眼根生。陷於地獄。經恆沙劫。方得受生。縱得受生。還遭育齔報。若不懺悔。難以消除。今對佛前。悉皆懺悔。懺悔已志心皈命禮十方無量三寶。

***Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Eye Faculty.***

With a one-pointed mind, I now repent:

I am (my name), from indefinite and immeasurable kalpas<sup>303</sup> until now,  
having lost the original mind,<sup>304</sup> not knowing the right path,  
having fallen into the three realms of suffering<sup>305</sup> by mistaking the six sense  
faculties.<sup>306</sup>

If [I do] not repent previous transgressions, it will be difficult to prevent future  
ones.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> *Edition 3* (misprinted): 軋 *yét*

<sup>303</sup> According to Buddhism, this describes how sentient beings reincarnate in the cycle of birth and death (*samsāra*) which is without beginning or end.

<sup>304</sup> The original mind is a translation of 本心 (*bổn tâm*), an important concept of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In Thiền tradition, it is also Buddha nature (佛性 *Phật tánh*), the original face (本來面目 *bổn lai diện mục*).

<sup>305</sup> The three realms of suffering or three evil realms are the realms of (1) hell, (2) hungry ghosts, and (3) animals.

<sup>306</sup> The six sensory faculties are faculties of (1) eye, (2) ear, (3) nose, (4) tongue, (5) body, and (6) mind. Trần Thái Tông continues this idea in his *Essay on the Encouragement for the Arising of the Bodhi-Mind* (普勸發菩提心 *Phổ khuyến phát bồ đề tâm*) in which he wrote that if one could get a human physical body whose six sense faculties were healthy and sufficient in six realms of *samsāra* world, they would be happier than many others. He wrote that the human body would be more precious than any material thing, for at least one would be able to escape from the sufferings of three evil realms.

The eye faculty karmas are:

Regard for evil causes that have ripened, [we] look down on [doing] wholesome deeds, paying attention to the illusory flower<sup>308</sup> by mistake, and neglecting the original moon.<sup>309</sup>

Love and hate arise, good and bad appearances fight against each other.

Delusion is produced in a glance; the right view is blindingly dazzling.

White comes, blue goes; purple is right, yellow is wrong.

Looking at everything incorrectly, it is not different from the blind.

Encountering beautiful persons, stare at them without a blink.

Confusing the past lives, [we] forget about our own original face.<sup>310</sup>

Seeing others' wealth and properties, stare with the largely open eyes.

Encountering the poor, [we] turn a blind eye on their miserable life.

Seeing the stranger's death, shed no drop of tear.

Passing away of the relatives, [we] break our own heart.

Seeing the Triple Gem, entering the Buddhist temple,

<sup>307</sup> This paragraph is repeated in the repentance for each sense faculty throughout the *Procedure*.

<sup>308</sup> The illusory flower (空花 *không hoa*) is a reference to the flecks in the air (*hoa đốm hư không*).

<sup>309</sup> The original moon symbolizes for the original mind, the Buddha nature of all beings. In this context, the author says that we all have a tendency to forget our Buddha nature, yet we always chase after its shadow or illusion.

<sup>310</sup> The original face (本來面目 *bản lai diện mục*), literally translated as “face and eyes originally come,” is a Thiền kōan and identifies with the Buddha nature, the nondual reality, or the original self. Trần Thái Tông was quite familiar with the term when he affirmed that he contemplated on the *Diamond Sūtra*. In *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam Tỳ*, he claimed that he had understood the core teaching of this *sūtra* in the same way the Sixth Patriarch Huineng had experienced it. This showed that the King admired Huineng and would read the *Platform Sūtra* of the Sixth Patriarch himself. The expression “original mind” is repeated several times in the *Platform Sūtra*. Therefore, we could understand how this phrase appeared several times in the *Essays*. For example, in the *Universal Lecture on the Form-Body* (普說色身 *Phổ thuyết sắc thân*), Trần Thái Tông wrote “traveling on the path of life and death, one has lost his/her original mind” (*Khu chì sanh tử lộ đầu, thất khước bản lai diện mục* 驅馳生死路頭。失却本來面目, *Essays*: 9b).

facing the Buddha images and scriptures, [we] take no notice.

In the Buddha's Hall or in the Saṅgha's residence,

men and women: date, exchange loves, and express sensual desires.

We show no respect to the Dharma protectors,<sup>311</sup> nor fear of the dragon deities.<sup>312</sup>

We entertain the corporal pleasures without a single shame.

All these transgressions are immeasurable and unlimited, [which are] generated from the eye faculty.

We would have been banished to the hell realms, passed through countless kalpas, only then be able to be reborn.

Even if we are able to be reborn, we become sightless as retribution.

If not repented and reformed, all these [transgressions] are eliminated with difficulty. [I am] now in front of the Buddhas, repenting all transgressions [that I have committed].

After repenting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the immeasurable Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心勸請

勸請十方三世佛。

及諸菩薩聖賢僧。

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<sup>311</sup> Dharma Protector (護法 *Hộ pháp*) in Vietnamese Buddhist context refers to *Hộ Pháp Vi Đà Tôn Thiên Bồ Tát*. He is a divinity in heavenly armor, hands are holding a Vajra dagger or a sword. Together with *Tiêu Diện Đại Sĩ*, a wrathful transformation of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, they are willing to guard and protect Buddhist followers. Their statues are placed on the left and right sides of the main shrine.

<sup>312</sup> The dragon deity (龍神 *Long thần*) is the second group of the eight kinds of guardians in Buddhism. In Buddhist scriptures, they often appear in the beginning as attendants in the assembly of Shakyamuni Buddha's preaching. They are described as protectors of Buddhism. They consist of heavenly beings (*deva*), dragons (*nāga*), cannibalistic demons (*yaksha*), gods of music (*gandharva*), belligerent demons (*asura*), golden birds that eat the *nāgas* (*garuda*), celestial music masters (*kinara*) and gods in snake forms (*mahoraga*).

廣開無量慈悲心<sup>313</sup>。

同證衆生登彼岸。

勸請已。志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

***Wholehearted Exhorting***

I devotedly exhort Buddhas in the three time periods of the ten directions,

bodhisattvas, sages, and venerable masters.

Extensively expand the immeasurable and compassionate heart,

with all sentient beings, [I] cross to the other shore.<sup>314</sup>

After devotedly exhorting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to

the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心隨喜

我今隨佛生歡喜。

昏曉虔誠禮懺因。

十地階梯願早登。

菩提真心無退轉。

隨喜已。志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

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<sup>313</sup> *Edition 1*: 大慈悲 *đại từ bi*

<sup>314</sup> The other shore (彼岸 *bí ngan*) is an expression of the *nirvāna* stage which is opposite to *samsāra* world. In *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, the “other shore” is a translation of *pāramitā*.



***Wholehearted Rejoicing***<sup>315</sup>

I now follow Buddhas to be joyful,

day and night, I sincerely pray and repent the causes of transgressions.

Vowing to attain the ten stages of the Bodhisattva's path,<sup>316</sup>

my true awakening mind will remain in a non-retrogressed stage.

After rejoicing, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the

unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心廻向

我等廻心皈聖衆。

慇懃頭<sup>317</sup>地禮慈尊。

願將功德及羣生。

憑此聖人<sup>318</sup>成正覺。

廻向已。志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

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<sup>315</sup> Rejoicing (隨喜 *tùy hỷ*) is an abbreviation of 隨喜功德 (*tùy hỷ công đức*), literally translated as “taking delight in other people’s virtuous acts”. This is one of the important qualities of Buddhist practitioners. This is the fifth vow of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* 大方廣佛華嚴經, (T. no. 293, vol. 10, p.0844b26).

<sup>316</sup> The “ten stages of the Bodhisattva’s path” (十地 *thập địa*) is derived from the Sanskrit word *daśabhūmi* which refers to the ten stages that a Bodhisattva has achieved on the way of attaining Buddhahood. They are: (1) the ground of joy 歡喜地; (2) the ground of freedom from defilement 離垢地; (3) the ground of radiance 發光地; (4) the ground of brilliant wisdom 燄慧地; (5) the ground of mastery of final difficulties 難勝地; (6) the ground of manifesting prajñā-wisdom 現前地; (7) the ground of proceeding afar 遠行地; (8) the ground of attaining calm 不動地; (9) the ground of finest discriminatory wisdom 善慧地; (10) the ground of Dharma cloud 法雲地. See the *Treatise on the Scripture of the Ten Stages* 十地經論, (T. no. 1522, vol. 26).

<sup>317</sup> Edition 1: 投 *dâu*

<sup>318</sup> Edition 1: 圓 *viên*

### *Wholehearted Merit Transferring*<sup>319</sup>

I turn my mind to the saintly Saṅgha,  
respectfully prostrate the Compassionate One.<sup>320</sup>

Wishing transference of merits to all beings,  
by doing all this, a sage could become a Buddha.

After transferring merits, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to  
the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心發願

一願普開明正見<sup>321</sup>。二願一拭闢塵育。

三願視形无著愛。四願覩<sup>322</sup>色莫開睛四願覩<sup>323</sup>色莫開睛。

五願迷頭須急認。六願慧目自圓成。

七願早回今世夢。八願永得本來明。

九願觀時除幻翳。十願望處絕花生。

十一願遙瞻障雲卷。十二願一瞬業冰清。

發願已。志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

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<sup>319</sup> Merit transferring (迴向 *hồi hướng*) is the tenth vow of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* 大方廣佛華嚴經, (T. no. 293, vol. 10, p.0844b28).

<sup>320</sup> The Compassionate One (慈尊 *Từ Tôn*) is the Buddha.

<sup>321</sup> *Edition 1: giác* 覺. This is misprinted possibly since Trần Thái Tông tended to use words related to a specific sensory faculty in the section of that sense's penitential service. For instance, he would use words related to the eye or functions of eyes or nature of seeing in the penitential service of the eye faculty. Therefore, "right view" (正見 *chánh kiến*) would be his better choice in comparison to "enlightenment" (正覺 *chánh giác*) in this context.

<sup>322</sup> *Edition 1: thị* 視

<sup>323</sup> *Edition 1: thị* 視

### ***Wholehearted Vow Making***<sup>324</sup>

First, I vow to grasp the true understanding [the right view].<sup>325</sup>

Second, I vow to wipe away the dusts covering my eyes.

Third, I vow to see form without attachment.

Fourth, I vow to see form without surprise [lit. opening my eyeballs].

Fifth, I vow to promptly realize my confused mind.

Sixth, I vow to achieve the true wisdom eye.

Seventh, I vow to quickly realize the illusion of this life.

Eighth, I vow to forever regain the original mind's illumination.

Ninth, I vow to eliminate illusion by keen observation.

Tenth, I vow to dissolve flower-like images that are born from the eyes.

Eleventh, I vow to see the hindrance clouds move far away.

Twelfth, I vow to purify the eye karma in a blink.

After making vows, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the

Triple Gem of the ten directions.

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<sup>324</sup> Vow making (發願 *phát nguyện*) is resolving or making one's vows in front of Buddhas. This frequently appears in repentance rituals. In Chinese Tiantai Buddhist school, the *Fahua Sanmei Jing* (法華三昧經 *Pháp Hoa Tam Muội Kinh*) introduces five steps of a repentance service: (1) repent the past unwholesome karmas and cultivate the wholesome ones (懺悔 *sám hối*), (2) exhort or encourage Buddhas of ten directions to turn the Dharma-wheel to save all sentient beings (勸請 *khuyến thỉnh*), (3) accord with other people's virtuous acts (隨喜 *tùy hỷ*), (4) transfer one's merits to all sentient beings (迴向 *hồi hướng*), and (5) make vows to attain Buddhahood (發願 *phát nguyện*). Trần Thái Tông's *Procedure* possibly followed these steps of repentance from the *Fahua Sanmei Jing*.

<sup>325</sup> Right view (正見 *chánh kiến*) is the first practice of the noble eightfold path, the way to end suffering and to achieve liberation in Buddhism. The other seven practices are right intention (正思惟 *chánh tư duy*), right speech (正語 *chánh ngữ*), right action (正業 *chánh nghiệp*), right livelihood (正命 *chánh mạng*), right effort (正精進 *chánh tinh tấn*), right mindfulness (正念 *chánh niệm*), and right concentration (正定 *chánh định*).

初日無常偈

夜色初分曉。晨光漸出空。

暗崔新髮白。漸改舊顏紅。

不覺年花促。猶爭業果雄。

身如水見睨。命似燭當風。

莫作長年客。終歸早照功。

***The Morning Impermanence Verses***<sup>326</sup>

In the dim light of night, dawn begins.

Slowly, the daylight permeates the sky.

Progressively, black hair turns into grey.

Gradually, the ruddy visage is fading away.

How should we know the age of youth is so short!

Yet, we still strive for power of the karmic fruits.<sup>327</sup>

Our body is like ice melting under the sunshine.

Our life is like a candle flickering in the wind.

Let us not be like a long-term guest

But return home early and take on self-reflection in the early morning.

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<sup>326</sup>The *Impermanence Verses* (無常偈 *vô thường kệ*) are verses of the universal law of changes. In the *Procedure*, this is placed in the last part of the repentance section. For instance, the “morning impermanence verses” are recited in the morning repentance service, and the “midday impermanence verses” are recited in the midday repentance service, etc. This applies to the six divisions of the day or the six sections of repentance services. Trần Thái Tông elaborated on the changing of the physical body from birth to old age, sickness, and death in *Tứ Sơn Kệ* as collected in the *Essays*.

<sup>327</sup> Karmic fruits or retributions (業果 *nghiệp quả*) are retributions that one would get depending on one’s past deeds (karma).

## 2. The Midday Repentance: For the Ear Faculty<sup>328</sup>

中日<sup>329</sup>祝香

伏以。太陽豐照。靈<sup>330</sup>景離明。顧日晝之難留。即今僂而仰叩。信將陳於寶座。香先炷於玉爐。

是香也。秀毓先天。非蓬島洲中產出。芳騰大地。豈旃檀林下生來。品名冠彼沉箋。氣味壓他蘭麝。祥煙起處。皆由三昧火燃。瑞靄<sup>331</sup>飛時。本自一元氣散。箇箇頂門皆透徹。人人鼻孔盡薰聞<sup>332</sup>。

茲因<sup>333</sup>懺悔之儀。輒效<sup>334</sup>獻焚之禮。以今日中。焚香供養。

### *The Midday Incense Praise*

Submit ourselves and reflect: The sun is shining; the scenery is illuminating.

Thinking that the day has gone, I swiftly come to the Buddha and reverently pray.

Surrendering my faith in the jeweled seat, I then burn incense in a jade furnace.

This incense is grown by nature not produced from the Bồng Đảo continent.<sup>335</sup>

Its fragrance spreads all over the earth; thus, how possible is that it is planted from the forest of sandalwood! Its brand name excels agarwood or sandalwood; its scent

<sup>328</sup> Title is added by the translator.

<sup>329</sup> *Edition 1*: 日中 *nhật trung*

<sup>330</sup> *Edition 3*: 雲 *vân*

<sup>331</sup> *Edition 1*: 蕩 *dăng*

<sup>332</sup> *Edition 1, Edition 2*: 開 *khai*

<sup>333</sup> *Edition 1*: 伸 *thân*

<sup>334</sup> *Edition 1*: 敬 *kính*

<sup>335</sup> The Bồng đảo continent 蓬島洲 or 蓬萊仙島 *Bồng lai tiên đảo* refers to a legendary place where the immortals reside.

overwhelms that of the wild orchids or musk. Lighted from *samādhi* fire,<sup>336</sup> the auspicious smoke of the incense permeates everywhere. Auspicious clouds originate and scatter from the gentle energy. Firmly gasping the true meaning in the mind, everyone could smell the special fragrance.

For the repentance ritual, I sincerely make the incense offering at noon.

獻香偈

沉水禪林香馥郁。旃檀慧苑舊栽培。

戒刀削就聳山形。熱向心瀘長供養。

### ***The Incense Offering Verses***

The agarwood from the meditative forest has a permeating scent.

The sandalwood from the discerning garden is cultivated by ages.

The moral knife sharpens [the incense] like the topmost mountain peak.

Burning incense, I wholeheartedly make the offering.

獻花偈

心地開時誇爛熳。諸天雨處讓芬芳。

枝七束七獻佛前。億劫業風吹不落。

### ***The Flower Offering Verses***

When the mind field opens, flowers flourish colorfully.

The heavenly beings rain fragrant flowers everywhere.

Turning into bouquets of flowers to offer in front of the Buddha.

Millions of kalpas of the karmic wind could not blow them away.

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<sup>336</sup> *Samādhi* fire (三昧火 *tam muội hỏa*, or 火焔三昧 *hỏa diệm tam muội*, 火生三昧 *hỏa sanh tam muội*, or 火光三昧 *hỏa quang tam muội*) is often mentioned as a practice of Tantric Buddhism.

啟白 <sup>337</sup>

敬啟十方大覺。三世雄師。翻六道而作六通。攝 <sup>338</sup>九類而歸公品。

竊聞。鄰鷄報午。曦馭當陽。遼天之紅彩方中。匝地之綠陽始正。影照而庭花弄玉。風來而提 <sup>339</sup>柳瑤金。輝輝灼灼耀瑤臺。碎碎團團重玉砌。獸爐香裊。天晴日麗碧霄中。僊枕睡濃晝永漏稀朱閣上。盛夏則金流石爍。隆冬則霧斂雪消。峯中而雜翳全收。離正而羣陰盡掃。對景性天洞徹。當時心地照 <sup>340</sup>融。頭頭總有光明。步步了 <sup>341</sup>無黑暗。

諸佛子 <sup>342</sup>。日既中而則昃。人有盛而必衰形骸不 <sup>343</sup>久堅。富貴非 <sup>344</sup>長保。進速渾如川上水。須臾恰似嶺頭雲。平時不作善因 <sup>345</sup>。異日定歸苦趣。當生深信。除却稽疑。早開諸佛心珠。照破衆生漆桶。但某甲等。謹想斯時以爲日中之禮。

### ***Initiation***

[I] respectfully initiate to the great awakened ones of the ten directions, the mighty masters of the three time periods. Transmute the six realms of existence<sup>346</sup> to

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<sup>337</sup> *Edition 1: Add 文 văn*

<sup>338</sup> *Edition 1: 接 tiếp*

<sup>339</sup> *Edition 1, and Edition 3: 堤 đề*

<sup>340</sup> *Edition 3: 昭 chiêu*

<sup>341</sup> *Edition 1: 全 toàn*

<sup>342</sup> *Edition 1: Add 等 đẳng*

<sup>343</sup> *Edition 1: Add 可 khả*

<sup>344</sup> *Edition 1: 豈能 khởi năng*

<sup>345</sup> *Edition 1: 仁 nhân*

become the six supernatural powers,<sup>347</sup> assimilate the nine kinds of birth<sup>348</sup> to the nine grades of rebirth [in the Pure Land] attainment.<sup>349</sup>

I hear a neighbor's cock crowing to signal at noon, as the sun is at its zenith. The bright red is in the middle of the sky high above; in all places, green willows' [shadows] starts to become upright. The golden light casts shadows of the willow leaves and stirs the wind as if playing with jade in the flowered courtyard. Brilliant glories illuminate the jade terrace, twinkling splendors flicker on the jeweled veranda. Swirls of delicate incense float over the "lion cub" burner. In the clear sky, the beautiful sun is in the middle of the blue firmament. As I sleep soundly on an immortal's pillow, the day is long and time flows slowly in the imperial palace. In the peak of summer, gold is melted and rock is broken. In the depth of winter, fog is thickening, and snow is falling. When the sun is at peak, dusk is cleared out. At midday, the dark clouds are swept away. Facing the world, the heaven nature is transparent; punctuated by time, the mind field is awakening. Thus, everywhere is lighted; every single step is without darkness.

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<sup>346</sup> The six realms of existence in Buddhism are six different realms in which one can take rebirth after death depending on one's karmas. They are (1) heaven realm, (2) jealous god realm, (3) human realm, (4) animal realm, (5) hungry ghost realm, and (6) hell realm.

<sup>347</sup> The six supernatural powers are six abilities possessed by a Buddha or an Arhat who attains the fourth stage of meditation. They are (1) unimpeded bodily action, (2) the power of divine vision, (3) the power of divine hearing, (4) the power of knowing the minds of others, (5) the power of knowing previous lifetimes of self and others, and (6) the power of complete extinction of afflictions.

<sup>348</sup> The nine kinds of birth include four births from (1) womb, (2) egg, (3) moisture, (4) transformation, and five births into heavens (5) of form, (6) of formless, (7) of thought, (8) of non-thought, and (9) of neither thought nor non-thought.

<sup>349</sup> The nine grades of attainment are also known as nine grades of lotuses or nine grades of rebirth in Pure Land Buddhism. They are divided into three categories of superior, middling, and inferior, and each of those categories consists of three levels: upper, middle, and lower. Together they make nine grades. This concept was discussed by both Huiyuan 慧遠 (523-592) and Shandao 善道 (613-681), two major Chinese Pure Land Patriarchs. For the nine grades of attainment classified by Huiyuan and Shandao, see more T. no. 1749, vol. 37, p.182a12-c22 and T. no. 1753, vol. 37, p.248b7-p.250a8 respectively.



Oh Buddhists! The sun is at zenith at noon and declines. Likewise, human life is up and down, human body matures then decays. Good fortunes and honors are short-lived. They are like water swiftly flowing in the rivers, like clouds fleeting over the mountains. In our lives, if we do not sow the seeds of good deeds, certainly one day we will arrive at a bitter destination. Thus, in this life, we should establish a profound faith and get rid of doubts and suspicions. We should urgently activate the pure mind of all Buddhas, to illuminate and destroy the paint bucket<sup>350</sup> of all living beings. Together with all sentient beings, I sincerely contemplate this time as the midday service.

懺悔耳根罪

志心懺悔。臣某<sup>351</sup>等。自從无始無量劫來。失却本心。罔知正道。墮三途苦。由六根非。若不懺前。難追悔後。

耳根業者。惡聞正法。好聽邪言。迷却本真。隨他外妄。喧喧絲竹。反謂龍吟。隱隱鐘魚。翻成哇鬧。巴歌鄭曲。忽有生心。唐讚梵言<sup>352</sup>。畧无側耳。風聞空響。暗起邀求。露聽善言。何曾仰受。三三酒友。兩兩花朋。道短談長。聚頭密聽。或逢師友。教訓丁寧。忠孝之言。掩聰<sup>353</sup>抵拒。或聞鉤響。忽已成姪。或半聽經。遂生馬耳。

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<sup>350</sup> The paint bucket in this context implies the human's body, which is filthy and subject to change in nature.

<sup>351</sup> *Edition 1*: 某甲 *mỗ giáp*

<sup>352</sup> *Edition 1*: 梵讚唐言 *Phạn độc Đường ngôn*

<sup>353</sup> *Edition 1* (misprinted): *tai* 腮

如斯等罪。無量無邊。種若塵沙。算之難盡。命終之後。復墮三塗。苦盡受生。還遭孽報。若不懺悔。何以消除。今對佛前。悉皆懺悔。懺悔已志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

***Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Ear Faculty***

With a one-pointed mind, I now repent:

I am (my name), from indefinite and immeasurable kalpas until now,  
having lost the original mind, not knowing the right path,  
having fallen into the three realms of suffering by mistaking the six sense  
faculties.

If [I do] not repent previous transgressions, it will be difficult to prevent future  
ones.

The ear faculty karmas are:

Hating to hear the right Dharma but enjoying hearing wicked words.

Confusing the original truth yet following the external absurdity.

Hearing loud music, regarding it as the “Song of the Dragon.”<sup>354</sup>

Listening to the chanting sound, considering it as the frog’s noise.

Paying close attention to the Ba’s songs and the Zheng’s melody,<sup>355</sup>

but not being mindful to the Tang’s praise<sup>356</sup> and the Buddhist scriptures.

Getting a piece of a flattering compliment, then being happy as wishes.

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<sup>354</sup> “Song of the Dragon” (龍吟 *Long ngâm* or 龍吟十弄 *Long ngâm thập lộng*) is an ancient piece of Chinese music written by Zheng Shuzu (鄭述祖 *Trịnh Thuật Tổ*) in Beiji 北齊 *Bắc Tề* dynasty.

<sup>355</sup> Ba and Zheng were two states of China in the Spring-Autumn and Warring States. Young people of this time were believed to have sung about love, songs which later Confucians claimed were lustful writings.

<sup>356</sup> Tang’s praise is a literary style of the Chinese Tang dynasty that praises the virtue and merits of the gentlemen.

Being advised with worthy words, not wanting to accept.

Gathering with a few drinking friends and several lewd fellows,

gossiping here and there, and together we eavesdrop.

When encountering good friends and teachers with valuable words,

we have turned a deaf ear and reject them.

Hearing the stimulating sound, arouse licentious feeling.

[However, while] listening to a little bit of the scripture, [we] become deaf (as a horse's ear).

All these transgressions are immeasurable and unlimited, like incalculable dust and sand.

After passing away, we could have fallen into the three evil realms again.

When the suffering ends and [we are able to] be reborn, we still have retribution of being born deaf.

If not repented and reformed, how would all these transgressions be eliminated?

Now, in front of the Buddha, I repent all transgressions [that I have committed].

After repenting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心勸請

勸請十方三世佛。及諸菩薩聖賢僧。

廣開無量慈悲心。同證衆生登彼岸。

勸請已。志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Exhorting***

I devotedly exhort the Buddhas in the three time periods of the ten directions,  
bodhisattvas, sages, and venerable masters.

Extensively expand the immeasurable and compassionate heart,  
with all sentient beings, [I] cross to the other shore.

After devotedly exhorting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to  
the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心隨喜

我今隨佛生歡喜。昏曉虔誠禮懺因。

十地階梯願早登。菩提真心無退轉。

隨喜已。志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Rejoicing***

I now follow Buddhas to be joyful,  
day and night, I sincerely pray and repent the causes of transgressions.

Vowing to attain the ten stages of the Bodhisattva's path,  
my true awakening mind will remain in a non-retrogressed stage.

After rejoicing, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the  
unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心廻向

我等廻心皈聖衆。慇懃頭地禮慈尊。

願將功德及羣生。憑此聖人成正覺。

廻向已。志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Merit Transferring***

I turn my mind to the saintly Saṅgha,

respectfully prostrate the Compassionate One.

Wishing transference of merits to all beings,

by doing all this, a sage could become a Buddha.

After transferring merits, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to  
the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心發願

一願對聲皆悟道。二願聽苦早須行。

三願聞聰具四達。四願聞樂盡無生。

五願妄言無漏入。六願正語急遙聆。

七願梵音常近側。八願法法鼓也須傾。

九願觀音相授手。十願慶喜共馳名。

十一願羣尊長破障。十二願兩朵永通靈。

發願已。志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Vow Making***

First, I vow to awaken to the Way when hearing a sound.

Second, I vow to cultivate the wholesome deeds when witnessing suffering.

Third, I vow to listen through the four states (of meditation practices).

Fourth, I vow to be joyful with all non-returners (arhats).

Fifth, I vow not to listen to false words.

Sixth, I vow to listen and quickly understand right speech.

Seventh, I vow to comprehend the Buddha's words.

Eighth, I vow to truly grasp the sound of the Dharma Drum.

Ninth, I vow to give a helping hand to Avalokiteśvara [Bodhisattva].

Tenth, I vow to become as well-known as Ānanda.

Eleventh, I vow to help the deaf forever destroy all hindrances.

Twelfth, I vow to have my ears keen and sharp.

After making vows, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

此時無常偈

瞥眼烏輪纔出<sup>357</sup>震。回頭曦馭又當離。

盡貪朽木寢尤熟。那肯<sup>358</sup>高槐影易移。

倏忽花陰重複倒<sup>359</sup>。逡巡困命盛還衰。

諸人盍早回光照。自苦驅馳畧路岐。

### ***The Impermanence Verses for This Time (Midday)***

In a blink of an eye, the sun has just risen in the east.

As our heads turn, the sun reaches its zenith.

As the forest rots, we are craving for sleeps.

Not knowing the shade of the locust tree<sup>360</sup> has moved.

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<sup>357</sup> *Edition 1*: 電 *diện*

<sup>358</sup> *Edition 3*: 省 *tỉnh*

<sup>359</sup> *Edition 1*: 到 *đáo*

<sup>360</sup> That locust tree in the verses is a classical reference that relates to the empty dream of Chunyu Fen 淳于棼 in Li Gongzuo's 李公佐 tale "An Account of the Governor of Nanke" 南柯太守傳, written during the Chinese Tang Dynasty.

Suddenly the shadows of flowers change here and there.

Fully bloom and completely wither, as a life of mushrooms.<sup>361</sup>

Why don't we go back early and reflect on ourselves?

But self-conflicted by wandering on the divergent paths.

### 3. The Sundown Repentance: For the Nose Faculty

日没祝<sup>362</sup>香

伏以半空霞<sup>363</sup>落。遠岫煙凝。躬<sup>364</sup>臨清淨壇場。面禮慈悲賢聖。期通丹悃  
庸熱寶香。

是香也。蓬島孤名。六洋異品。豈沉水獻從林邑。非蘇油貢自大秦。氣超澧  
縣麝臍。未達烏菟龍腦。獨擅太高之價。遠騰不衆之馨。寶篆一飛。梵席薰成檀世  
界。玉爐纔起。璇宵結作蜃樓臺。尋來幻釋乾城。嗅著酸停閻獄。

以今日没。焚香供養。

#### *The Sundown Incense Praise*

Submit ourselves and reflect: The red clouds are sinking on the horizon; smoke  
thickens on the mountain peak afar. Coming to the purified platform myself, I am bowing  
to the compassionate noble ones. In the hope that my sincerity be known, I burn the  
precious incense to make offerings.

<sup>361</sup> "Life of mushrooms" is a metaphor for a short and unstable life.

<sup>362</sup> *Edition 1: phàn* 焚

<sup>363</sup> *Edition 1: lộ* 露

<sup>364</sup> *Edition 1: thân* 身

This incense is famous at Bồng Đảo, a distinguished product of Lục Dương.<sup>365</sup> How could this permeated incense be presented from Lâm Ấp?<sup>366</sup> Nor could it be the styrax tribute to Đại Tần;<sup>367</sup> its aroma transcends the deer musk of Phong Huyện,<sup>368</sup> the scent exceeds the camphor of Ô Trành.<sup>369</sup> It alone has the highest value, its fragrance soars [into the air] further than all other fragrances.

As precious incense is flying over the burner, the Brahman seat<sup>370</sup> is permeated and turned into a sandalwood realm. The jade furnace has started, the heavenly firmament circulates with fumes creating a mirage palace. Reaching the city of Gandhāras, all illusions are destroyed immediately by the fragrance. Its aroma touches the hell of Yama to end suffering. At sundown, I burn this incense to make offerings.

獻香偈

沉水禪林香馥郁。旃檀慧苑舊栽培。

戒刀削就聳山形。熱向心瀘長供養。

### ***The Incense Offering Verses***

The agarwood from the meditative forest has a permeating scent.

The sandalwood from the discerning garden is cultivated by ages.

The moral knife sharpens [the incense] like the topmost mountain peak.

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<sup>365</sup> *Lục Dương* 六洋 may also be a residing place for the immortals, similar to *Bồng Đảo*.

<sup>366</sup> *Lâm Ấp* 林邑 is the ancient name of Champa kingdom.

<sup>367</sup> *Đại Tần* 大秦 refers to the Roman Empire.

<sup>368</sup> *Phong Huyện* 豐縣 is a county of Hunan, China.

<sup>369</sup> *Ô Trành* 烏菴 is a country in Northern India, mentioned in the *Journey to the West* of Xuanzang.

<sup>370</sup> The Brahman seat (梵席 *phạn tịch*) refers to the place where monks offering incense or give Dharma talks.



Burning incense, I wholeheartedly make the offering.

獻花偈

心地開時誇爛熳。諸天雨處讓芬芳。

枝七束七獻佛前。億劫業風吹不落。

*The Flower Offering Verses*

When the mind field opens, flowers flourish colorfully.

The heavenly beings rain fragrant flowers everywhere.

Turning into bouquets of flowers to offer in front of the Buddha.

Millions of kalpas of the karmic wind could not blow them away.

啟白 <sup>371</sup>

敬啟。十方大覺。三世雄師。揮慧劍於邪林。曳慈風於火宅。

竊聞丹霞冠嶺。白日 <sup>372</sup>含山。城頭而畫角韻悲。簾外之 <sup>373</sup>寒砧聲切。曲浦而漁舟唱挽。投林而鳥翮飛輕。微芒鴈鷺落平沙。蕭索蟬蛩鳴禁柳。野闊而螢光數點。天高而兔魄半鉤。柴扉初掩鷄棲埭。燈火未來牛下徑。徑客揚鞭忙似箭。歸舟鼓棹急如梭。深憫昏徒重遭暗 <sup>374</sup>道。青晝裏尚不知去處。黃昏後轉忘却自家。底輩如不具眼人。這景必歸迷路漢。

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<sup>371</sup> *Edition 1: Add 文 vãn*

<sup>372</sup> *Edition 1: 日已 nhật dĩ*

<sup>373</sup> *Edition 1: 而 nhi*

<sup>374</sup> *Edition 1: 遭遠 tao viễn*

諸佛子 <sup>375</sup>。當念無常進速。勿貪浮世奢華。切須驀鼻牽回 <sup>376</sup>。莫要 <sup>377</sup>縱心  
放去。各自回光內照。毋令逐影外求。若是知音。正好進步。

但某甲等。謹想斯時。以爲日沒之禮。

### *Initiation*

Respectfully initiate to the great awakened ones of the ten directions, the mighty masters of the three time periods. Brandish the wisdom sword in the evil forest; blow the compassionate wind to the burning house. I see the colorful evening clouds cover mountain-peaks, as the sun is sinking down a mountain side. From the head [tower] of city walls, there is a sad tune of the watcher's horn. Outside the curtain, there is a somber sound of the striking anvil. The sound of evening singing as the fishing boats get back to the pier. Flying in the air, the birds return to the forests and the geese gently land on flat sand. Cicadas are crying sadly in the dense willows. Some fireflies kindle in a wide road, and a crescent moon hangs in the lofty sky. A brushwood gate has just closed, herds of chicken return to their perches. Light has not flickered yet; herds of water buffalo return to their den's gates. A traveler whips his horse at a speedy gallop, and the returning boats row quickly back home. I deeply sympathize for the ignorant, who repeatedly fall into the dark path; even in the light of day, they cannot find the way out because they have no eyesight. Such a scene displays those who have lost their way.

Oh Buddhists! We should remember that impermanence has come quickly; [and we] should not crave for the sumptuousness of this fleeting life. We must pull our noses

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<sup>375</sup> *Edition 1: Add 等 đẳng*

<sup>376</sup> *Edition 3: 來 lai*

<sup>377</sup> *Edition 1: 使 sử*

and turn our heads back. Do not let the uncontrolled mind wander off. Each of us should only go back and reflect within. Do not pursue or look for external reflections. If you are my soulmate, may you have good progress.

With all sentient beings, I sincerely contemplate this time as the evening service.

懺悔鼻根罪

志心懺悔。臣某<sup>378</sup>等。自從無始無量劫來。失却本心。罔知正道。墮三塗苦。由六根非。若不懺前。難追悔後。

鼻根業者。常貪異氣。百和氤氲。不愛真香。五炷清淨。蘭飄麝散惟務尋求戒變<sup>379</sup>定薰何曾嗅覺。沉燒檀爇。於佛像前。引首偷馨。拂煙納氣。隨他塵識。慢彼龍神。唯好逆聞。畧無厭倦。桃顏杏臉。拽去肯離。覺樹心花。驀回不顧。或臨市肆。或入庖廚。就穢思飡。慕羶覓食。不籤嫌腥臭。不忌葷辛眈著無休如諸溷廁。或偷寒涕。或迸黃膠拭柱投堦。污于淨地或因醉臥。佛殿僧堂。兩孔息流。薰經衝像。嗅蓮爲盜聞氣成姪。不覺不知。由於鼻業。

如斯等罪。無量無邊。捨命之時。三塗受苦。經塵沙劫。方得受生。還遭壅報。若不懺悔。何以消除。今對佛前。悉皆懺悔。

懺悔已志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

### ***Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Nose Faculty***

With a one-pointed mind, I now repent:

I am (my name), from indefinite and immeasurable kalpas until now,  
having lost the original mind, not knowing the right path,

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<sup>378</sup> Edition 1: 某甲 *mô giáp*

<sup>379</sup> Edition 1: 慾 *dục*

having fallen into the three realms of suffering by mistaking the six sense faculties.

If [I do] not repent previous transgressions, it will be difficult to prevent future ones.

The nose faculty karmas are:

Craving for different smells ceaselessly, enjoying hundreds of dense aromas blended.

Not liking the true fragrance of the five kinds of purified scent,  
we keep looking for the floating fragrance of orchids and the scattering musk,  
[yet we have] never cared for the fragrance [from the practices] of *sīla* and *samādhi*.

[When] burning the sandalwood incense to offer in front of the Buddha's statue,  
we extend our heads out to steal the fragrance by basking in the smoke to get its scent.

In accordance with such a habitual knowledge, we disrespect the dragon deities.

We have been enjoying and never wearying of common smells.

Refusing to let go of rosy cheeks and the corner of the eye.

Even though the awakened tree and flowery heart are in front of us, we still turn our back on them.

When going to markets or entering kitchens, we are longing for unwholesome foods, and foraging for foul scraps.

Neither do we abhor reeking smells nor abstain from pungent herbs,

Give ourselves up to them, [we are] just like pigs that plunge deep into the cesspit.

Either we blow nasal mucus, spit yellow sputa,  
 daub the pillars, smear the stairs, dirty the clean places,  
 or intoxicated, sleeping in the Buddha's Hall or Saṅgha's residence.  
 Our flowing breath from two nostrils contaminate sūtras and [Buddha] images.  
 Stealing the lotus's scent,<sup>380</sup> taking a whiff of that aroma [and] lustfulness arises.  
 We have not realized nor been aware of all that is due to the nose's karma.  
 All these transgressions are immeasurable and boundless.  
 At the time of approaching death, we would have suffered in the three evil realms.  
 Only then can we possibly be reborn after countless kalpas have passed.  
 However, when returning to [the human realm], as retribution, we have an  
 obstructed nose.  
 If not repented and reformed, how could these [transgressions] be eliminated?  
 [I] now in front of the Buddha, repent all the transgressions [that I have  
 committed].  
 After repenting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the  
 unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心勸請

勸請十方三世佛。及諸菩薩聖賢僧。

廣開無量慈悲心。同證衆生登彼岸。

勸請已志心皈命禮十方无上三寶。

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<sup>380</sup> There was a certain monk who was captivated by the fragrance of lotus blossoms in a pond next to his monastery and neglected his meditation practice. Then the pond's god appeared and accused him of stealing the sweet scent of his lotus. The story implies that the fondness or attachment of a scent can lead one to moral defilements. Details of the story or conversations between that monk and the god was found in *Gandhatthena Sutta* (Si. 204).

In the *Essay on the Precept of [Non-]Stealing* (戒偷盜[文] *Giới Thâu Đạo [Văn]*), Trần Thái Tông also cited this story (*Khửu trì liên địa thần thượng a* 嗅池蓮地神尙呵。 *Essays*: 18a).

### ***Wholehearted Exhorting***

I devotedly exhort the Buddhas in the three time periods of the ten directions,  
bodhisattvas, sages, and venerable masters.

Extensively expand the immeasurable and compassionate heart,  
with all sentient beings, [I] cross to the other shore.

After devotedly exhorting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to  
the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心隨喜

我今隨佛生歡喜。昏曉虔誠禮懺因。

十地皆梯願早登。菩提真心無退轉。

隨喜已志心皈命禮十方无上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Rejoicing***

I now follow Buddhas to be joyful,  
day and night, I sincerely pray and repent the causes of transgressions.

Vowing to attain the ten stages of the Bodhisattva's path,  
my true awakening mind will remain in a non-retrogressed stage.

After rejoicing, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the  
unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心廻向

我等回心歸聖衆。慇懃投地禮慈尊。

願將功德及羣生。憑此勝因成正覺。

廻向已志心皈命禮十方无上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Merit Transferring***

I turn my mind to the saintly Saṅgha,  
respectfully prostrate to the Compassionate One.

Wishing transference of merits to all beings,  
by doing all this, a sage could become a Buddha.

After transferring merits, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to  
the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心發願

一願出祛邪氣亂。二願納入慧香薰。

三願閉成無漏孔。四願喘散有緣塵。

五願驀回三寶道。六願噉去四生鄰。

七願息除煩惱障。八願嗅著覺花新。

九願常通諸法種。十願永塞五辛因。

十一願牽來游性海。十二願拽出離迷津。

發願已志心皈命禮十方无上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Vow Making***

First, I vow to blow out the tangled unhealthy energy.

Second, I vow to breathe in the wisdom fragrance deeply.

Third, I vow to shut down the defiled nostrils completely.

Fourth, I vow to breathe out and disperse the worldly karmic connections.

Fifth, I vow to go back to the path of the Triple Gem right away.

Sixth, I vow to make a sneeze to wipe off the neighbor of the four forms of birth.<sup>381</sup>

Seventh, I vow to remove the afflictive hindrance<sup>382</sup> in a breath.

Eighth, I vow to take in a scent of the fresh enlightening flower.

Ninth, I vow to always know all seeds of Dharma thoroughly.

Tenth, I vow to snuff the causes of the five pungent spices perpetually.

Eleventh, I vow to take others to swim in the ocean of original nature.<sup>383</sup>

Twelfth, I vow to draw [all beings] away from the delusive state.

After making vows, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

此時無常偈

景逼西山暮。何時昔寸陰。

唯能奔馬意。那肯住猿心。

日出還將沒。身浮又<sup>384</sup>復沉。

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<sup>381</sup> The four forms of birth (四生 *tứ sinh*) include birth from an egg (卵生 *noãn sinh*), birth from a womb (胎生 *thai sinh*), birth from moisture (濕生 *thấp sinh*), and birth by transformation (化生 *hóa sinh*). In the *Essay on the Precept of [Non-]Killing* (戒殺生文 *Giới Sát Sinh Văn*), Trần Thái Tông wrote: “Regardless of being born from an egg, a womb, from moisture and by transformation, the nature of knowing, understanding, seeing and hearing of all beings is not different.” (*Phù noãn, thai, thấp, hoá tính đồng, kiến, văn, giác, tri khởi dị*. 夫卵胎濕化性同。見聞覺知豈異。 *Essays*: 17a).

<sup>382</sup> Afflictive hindrance/obstacle (煩惱障 *phiền não chướng*) is the obstacle created by afflictions, which is one of the three obstacles. The other two barriers include the obstacle created by karmas (業障 *nghiệp chướng*) and the obstacle created by karmic retribution (報障 *báo chướng*). For the content of three obstacles, see *The Great Nirvāṇa Sūtra* (大般涅槃經 *Đại Bát Niết Bàn Kinh*, T. no. 374, vol. 12, p.0428b20-p.0429a21), and *The Large Sūtra of Perfect Wisdom* (大般若波羅蜜多經 *Đại Bát Nhã Ba La Mật Đa Kinh*, T. no. 220, vol. 7, p.09873b18-19).

<sup>383</sup> The ocean of original nature (性海 *tính hải*) refers to the vastness of Buddha nature of every sentient being. “To take others to swim in the ocean of original nature” means that one has already achieved liberation and helped others to achieve it too.



老來愚與智。死去古和令。

不免无常到。難逃大限臨。

各各<sup>385</sup>行正道。勿使入邪林。

***The Impermanence Verses for This Time (Sundown)***

Light fades, the sun sinks to the mountain west.

When have we regretted the loss of time?

A single thought can move swiftly like a horse at full gallop.

The monkey mind<sup>386</sup> has never stopped [wandering].

The sun has risen, then set.

Life is floating and sinking over and over again.

Old age comes to the ignorant and the wise alike.

Death appears in the past and at the present.

Impermanence comes and is unavoidable.

Running away from mortality is impossible.

We, therefore, should walk on the right path,

and not enter to the wicked forest.

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<sup>384</sup> *Edition 1*: 却 *khước*

<sup>385</sup> *Edition 3*: 宜 *nghi*

<sup>386</sup> The monkey mind (猿心 *viên tâm*) often appears in the recorded sayings of Chan/Thiền masters. In Chinese writings, it is related with the horse thought, a literary translation of 馬意 (*mǎ yì*) referring to restlessness, indecisiveness, confusion, and the whimsicality of our minds: a monkey keeps swinging from branch to branch, a wild horse at full gallop is uncontrollable.

#### 4. The Evening Repentance: For the Tongue Faculty

黃昏勸衆偈

景送桑榆暮。山西<sup>387</sup>日已沉。

光陰難久駐。老病易相侵。

死至誰能戀。期來熟可禁。

諸人須著眼。昏散勿關<sup>388</sup>心。

#### *The Evening Admonition to the Saṅgha Verses*

The brightness inclines over the elms and mulberry trees.

The sun is sinking down to the mountain west.

It is hard to hold time back forever,

while old age and sickness come after us unquestionably.

When death arrives, who could yearn for life?

and when the time comes, who could withstand death?

We all, therefore, must concentrate

and keep our minds free from sloth, torpor, and restlessness.<sup>389</sup>

八苦偈<sup>390</sup>

生至成人形役役。老將及耄意蒙蒙。

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<sup>387</sup> *Edition 1 and Edition 2*: 西山 tây sơn

<sup>388</sup> *Edition 1*: 開 khai

<sup>389</sup> Sloth and torpor (昏 hôn or 昏沉 hôn trầm) and restlessness (散 tán or 散亂 tán loạn) are forces that make our minds confused and muddle-headed and make bodies heavy and weary. These states appear more obvious when we meditate. *Yogācāra* Buddhist school categorizes them as secondary mental disturbances (隨煩惱 tùy phiền não).

<sup>390</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 云 vân

病侵四大痛難忍。死入三塗<sup>391</sup>業易逢。

恩愛別離哀不盡。怨憎會遇恨無窮。

干求不得增煩惱。五陰<sup>392</sup>相爭熾盛<sup>393</sup>雄。

### ***Eight Kinds of Suffering Verses***

From birth to adulthood, our body is miserable.

Reaching the age of octogenarians, our minds are in doubt.

Sickness impinges upon the four great elements,<sup>394</sup> pain is unbearable.

When death comes, [we] enter the three evil realms, and easily facing  
unwholesome karma.

Despite being deeply in love, separation occurs, sadness is endless.

Being associated with people and things that we dislike, aversion is inexhaustible.

Despite wishing for a thousand times, it is unobtainable, distress has increased.

The five aggregates<sup>395</sup> conflict with one another, burning in a powerful flame.

初夜<sup>396</sup>祝香

伏以螢火點空。漁燈照水。壇上齊臨淨侶。爐中初發信香。

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<sup>391</sup> *Edition 1*: 途 *đồ*

<sup>392</sup> *Edition 1*: 蘊 *uẩn*

<sup>393</sup> *Edition 1*: 貫 *quán*

<sup>394</sup> The four great elements (making up a human body) are (1) earth, (2) water, (3) air, and (4) fire.

<sup>395</sup> The five aggregates are the five constituents that inform the physical and mental existence of a sentient being. They consist of (1) form, (2) sensations, (3) perceptions, (4) mental formations, and (5) consciousness.

<sup>396</sup> *Edition 1* (misprinted): 日 *nhật*

是香也。產不<sup>397</sup>落山。種非沉水。豈預神龍<sup>398</sup>鬪出。祇緣菩薩積藏。牛頭林裏擅無雙。鷄舌叢中推第一。慧劍伐而戒刀削。聳出清奇。定水洗而昧火焚。鬱來馥郁。豈止當場親納。盡來普處遙聞。一縷氣通。多生業盡。

以今初夜。焚香供養。

### *The Early Evening Incense Praise*

Submit ourselves and reflect: The fireflies dot the sky, and fishing lamps reflect in water. On a high platform, the Saṅgha is gathering. In an incense burner, the incense of faith has just burned. This incense is neither a product of Mount Lạc<sup>399</sup> nor a kind of sandalwood. How could it be offered by the dragon deities? But it has been accumulated by Bodhisattvas. In the Ox-Head Forest,<sup>400</sup> this scent is incomparable; in the Rooster-Tongue Grove,<sup>401</sup> it is honored as the foremost scent. Being cut by the wisdom sword and pared by a moral knife, it is wonderful and highly purified. It is washed by meditative water and burned by *samādhi* fire. Its fragrance is pervasive. Not only can this [high] platform be detected, but everywhere, near or far, is also scented. If a wisp of its smoke

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<sup>397</sup> *Edition 1*: 自 *tự*

<sup>398</sup> *Edition 1*: 龍神 *long thần*

<sup>399</sup> Mount Lạc is a legendary mountain where immortals reside as Bồng Đào.

<sup>400</sup> The Ox-Head Forest (牛頭林 *ngưu đầu lâm*), located in Southern India, was famous for incense products. The *Sūtra of the Right Mindfulness of Dharma* (正法念經 *Chánh Pháp Niệm Kinh*) says that the mountain is immeasurably high in the shape of an ox-head in which a precious sandalwood tree was planted called ox-head sandalwood. Other Buddhist scriptures such as the *Great Perfection of Wisdom Treaties* (大智度論 *Đại Trí Độ Luận*), (T. no. 1509, vol. 25), and *Record of Journey to the West* (大唐西域記 *Đại Đường Tây Vực Kí*), (T. no. 2087, vol. 51), note that the incense of the Ox-Head Forest is unsurpassable, meaning it is unable to be found anywhere else.

<sup>401</sup> Similar to the sandalwood of the Ox-Head Forest, the incense of Rooster-Tongue Grove (鷄舌叢 *kê thiệt tùng*) is precious.

penetrates, the karmic retributions of numerous lifetimes end. In this early evening, I burn this incense to make an offering.

獻香偈

沉水禪林香馥郁。旃檀慧苑舊栽培。

戒刀削就聳山形。爇向心瀘長供養。

***The Incense Offering Verses***

The agarwood from the meditative forest has a permeating scent.

The sandalwood from the discerning garden is cultivated by ages.

The moral knife sharpens [the incense] like the topmost mountain peak.

Burning incense, I wholeheartedly make the offering.

獻花偈

心地開時誇爛熳。諸天雨處讓芬芳。

枝七束七獻佛前。億劫業風吹不落。

***The Flower Offering Verses***

When the mind field opens, flowers flourish colorfully.

The heavenly being rain fragrant flower everywhere.

Turning into bouquets of flowers to offer in front of the Buddha.

Millions of kalpas of the karmic wind could not blow them away.

啟白 <sup>402</sup>

敬啟。十方大覺。三世雄師。廣開諸佛慧燈。普照羣生暗室。竊聞樓笳初咽。

禁鼓方傳。家家之蠟燭搖光。處處之龍膏吐燄。寶馬停嘶於紫陌。金鱗罷躍於清池。

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<sup>402</sup> Edition 1: Add 文 vãn

依稀水面度螢光。隱約山頭啣兔魄。鳳凰臺畔。昏昏嗜酒貪歡。鸚鵡樓前。懵懵迷花取樂。或嘲風詠月。或弄笛舞琴。人人須著眼前緣。箇箇<sup>403</sup>都忘身後事。

諸佛子<sup>404</sup>。須省前程難進去<sup>405</sup>。勿懷高枕打眠來。上床難保下床。今夜豈知來夜。第一義門須直入。於三惡道莫親行。回頭認入自家鄉。開眼勿甘浮世夢。但某甲等。謹想斯時以爲初夜之禮。

### ***Initiation***

[I] respectfully initiate to the great awakened ones in ten directions, the mighty masters of three time periods. Widely open the wisdom lamp of all the Buddhas that shines gloriously to the dark houses of all beings. I hear the reed whistle has just passed, the forbidden drum has transmitted, candles are lighted in rows in every house, the dragon oil lamps blaze in flame everywhere. A noble horse stops neighing on a purple street; a golden fish ceases to leap in a clean pond. Dimly, fireflies are flying on the water surface; lightly, a mountain is holding the moon on its peak. Besides the Phụng Hoàng Platform,<sup>406</sup> [there is someone who] indulges in intoxication and getting others drunk on wine. In front of the Anh Vũ Palace,<sup>407</sup> [there is another one who] gratifies lust and finds

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<sup>403</sup> *Edition 1*: 了了 *liêu liêu*

<sup>404</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 等 *đẳng*

<sup>405</sup> *Essays 1*: 步 *bộ*

<sup>406</sup> The Phụng Hoàng Platform (鳳凰臺 *Phụng Hoàng Đài*) is located in Jinling 金陵 Kim Lăng (pre-Han name for Nam Kinh 南京). Li Bai 李白 (701-762) wrote a poem named *Atop the Phoenix Platform of Jinling* (登金陵鳳凰臺 *Đăng Kim Lăng Phụng Hoàng Đài*) when he visited this beautiful place.

<sup>407</sup> The Anh Vũ Palace (鸚鵡樓 *Anh Vũ Lâu*) is not found in any classical reference. Li Bai also wrote another poem titled *Anh Vũ Châu* 鸚鵡洲. It is possible that Trần Thái Tông took the name of *Anh Vũ Lâu* from that poem. The Phụng Hoàng Platform and Anh Vũ Palace in this writing referred to the entertaining places where people enjoy their sensual pleasures.

amusement. [There is someone who] ridicules or flirts with women. [There is also another one] who plays the flute or dances with the zither. Everyone only concentrates on the present karmic conditions while neglecting the retributions [one may get] in the afterlife.

Oh Buddhists! We must be aware that the future path is hard to enter; do not just take pleasure in sleeping on a high pillow. When going to bed, it is not assured that we will wake the next day. During this night, we do not know about tomorrow night. We should enter the gate of ultimate truth<sup>408</sup> straightaway, and not closely walk into the three evil realms.<sup>409</sup> Let's turn our heads and come back to our homeland. Let's open our eyes and not succumb to a sweet dream in this impermanent world.

All sentient beings and I sincerely contemplate this time as early evening service.

懺悔舌根罪

志心懺悔。臣某<sup>410</sup>等。自從無始無量劫來。忘却本心。罔知正道。墮三塗苦。由六根非。若不懺前。難追悔後。

舌根業者。貪諸味味。好辨精粗。嘗盡頭頭。暗知肥瘦。傷殘物命。度養自家。炮炙飛潛。烹煎遊走。腥膻褻口。葱蒜熏腸。喫了索來。未曾永飽。或臨齋醮。禮佛祈<sup>411</sup>神。忍受飢虛。待於事畢。晨朝素膳。飯少水多。真自病人。彊飡葯粥。膏脂满目。談笑欣欣。酒勸食行。暖來冷退。筵賓待客。嫁女婚男。殺害衆生。皆

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<sup>408</sup> The gate of ultimate truth is a literary translation of 第一義門 (*đệ nhất nghĩa môn*), which is a state of mind that an awakened one has achieved so that he/she would be free from circle of birth and death or free from all forms of mental afflictions or defilements.

<sup>409</sup> Three evil realms are hell (*địa ngục*), hungry ghosts (*ngạ quỷ*), and animals (*súc sanh*).

<sup>410</sup> Edition 1: 某甲 *mỗ giáp*

<sup>411</sup> Edition 1: 求 *cầu*

由三寸。妄言構作。綺語織成。兩舌橫生。惡口興起。嗎詈三寶。呪咀二親。調聖欺賢。謗君誣父。道他長短。掩己是非。評論古今。抑揚彼此。矜誇豪富。凌辱貧窮。擯退僧尼。責呵僮僕。譸言若毒。巧語如簧。文過飭非。道虛爲實。怨咨寒暑。咳唾江河。戲論僧房。喧奴佛殿<sup>412</sup>。

如斯等罪。無量無邊。論彼塵沙。算之莫盡。命終之日。拔舌自投。鐵犁長耕。鎔銅永灌。地獄報盡。萬劫方生。縱得爲人。還遭啞報。若不懺悔。何以消除。今對佛前。悉皆懺悔。

懺悔已志心歸命禮十方無上三寶。

***Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Tongue Faculty***

With a one-pointed mind, I now repent:

I am (my name), from indefinite and immeasurable kalpas until now,  
having lost the original mind, not knowing the right path,  
having fallen into the three realms of suffering by mistaking the six sense  
faculties.

If [I do] not repent previous transgressions, it will be difficult to prevent future  
ones.

The tongue faculty karmas are:

Craving for all kinds of taste, relishing the discrimination between refined and  
coarse [tastes].

When sampling all the foods, implicitly knowing the fat and lean.

Harming lives of animals to support our own family,

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<sup>412</sup> Edition 2, Edition 3: 念 niệm



we fry or roast the poultry, boil or cook the cattle.

[Even if with the foods having] a foul smell, we really eat voraciously,

[and let] the smell of green onion and garlic suffuse our intestines.

After eating, we again look for [unwholesome] foods, but never feel fulfilled enough.

While coming to a vegetarian fast, or when worshipping Buddhas and praying for deities, we endure our starvation in vain and wait until the ceremony is over.

When fasting in the morning, [we] consume less rice and more water, just being like sick persons, [we] try to finish porridge like taking medicine.

Whenever meaty and delicious foods fill our eyes, we chat and laugh happily, we get others drunk on wine or invite them to eat, preferring the warm [foods] and refusing to eat the cold ones.

When inviting guests and treating friends, or marrying off sons and daughters, we kill and harm sentient beings; thus, all [these actions] are because of the three inches.<sup>413</sup>

[We] tell lies and slander others, or make up entire stories, overflowing with double-tongued talks and rising harsh speeches.

[We] scold and curse the Triple Gem; antagonize parents, cheat the virtuous and deceive the noble ones.

[We] defame the monarch and accuse our fathers falsely, or talk about others' articles of slander while covering up our mistakes.

[We] discuss then and now, praise and blame this and that [matter], or show off our riches and honors and humiliate the poor.

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<sup>413</sup> The three inches refers to the tongue.

[We] drive away Buddhist monks and nuns, storm at the servants.

Slandorous talk is like poison, false speech is like metallic reed.

Opulent words have covered our faults, [we] make false speech into a truth.

[We] blame the heat and cold, or spit on our homeland,

talk nonsense in the Saṅgha's residence, and brag in the Buddha Hall.

These transgressions are immeasurable and boundless, like dust and sand, which is uncountable.

On the day of death, we shall be banished into the hell of plowing tongues.

[While] an iron plough is plowing constantly, [boiled] melted copper pour over our tongues continuously.

[When] retribution ends in the hells; we would be reborn after ten thousand kalpas.

Despite being able to reincarnate as human, [we] bear the retribution of being dumb.

If not repented and reformed, how can transgressions be eliminated?

Now, in front of Buddhas, I repent all transgressions that I have committed.

After repenting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心勸請

勸請十方三世佛。及諸菩薩聖賢僧。

廣開無量慈悲心。同證衆生登彼岸。

勸請已志心皈命禮十方无上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Exhorting***

I devotedly exhort the Buddhas in the three time periods of the ten directions,  
bodhisattvas, sages, and venerable masters.

Extensively expand the immeasurable and compassionate heart,  
with all sentient beings, [I] cross to the other shore.

After devotedly exhorting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to  
the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心隨喜

我今隨佛生歡喜。昏曉虔誠禮懺因。

十地皆梯願早登。菩提真心無退轉。

隨喜已志心皈命禮十方无上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Rejoicing***

I now follow Buddhas to be joyful,  
day and night, I sincerely pray and repent the causes of transgressions.

Vowing to attain the ten stages of the Bodhisattva's path,  
my true awakening mind will remain in a non-retrogressed stage.

After rejoicing, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the  
unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心廻向

我等回心歸聖衆。慇懃投地禮慈尊。

願將功德及羣生。憑此勝因成正覺。

廻向已志心皈命禮十方无上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Merit Transferring***

I turn my mind to the saintly Saṅgha,

respectfully prostrate the Compassionate One.

Wishing transference of merits to all beings,

by doing all this, a sage could become a Buddha.

After transferring merits, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to  
the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心發願

一願飽餐無上味。二願吐却世間腥。

三願辨財除衆惑。四願樂說度羣生。

五願轉時無盡藏。六願吸盡法流傾。

七願早回大愚吐。八願速共臨濟聲。

九願廣長與佛覆。十願清淨等天成。

十一願世間無音暗啞。十二願地獄畢犁耕。

發願已志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Vow Making***

First, I vow to be satisfied with the unexcelled taste.

Second, I vow to cough out all worldly flavors.

Third, I vow to recognize and remove all myriad mental disturbances skillfully.

Fourth, I vow to teach the Dharma to save all sentient beings joyfully.

Fifth, I vow to read the endless treasury of [Buddhist texts] completely.

Sixth, I vow to drink up all sources of Dharma that is flowing.

Seventh, I vow to revolve the spit of Đại Ngu<sup>414</sup> early.

Eighth, I vow to share the shout of Lâm Tế<sup>415</sup> quickly.

Ninth, I vow to have my tongue as wide and long as the Buddha's.

Tenth, I vow to be as peaceful as the sky is naturally.

Eleventh, I vow that none of us in the world is dumb or has a speech impediment.

Twelfth, I vow that the plowing hell cease to punish.

After making vows, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

此時無常偈

日色沒時臨夜色。昏衢擾擾又重增。

徒知外點他家燭。不肯回燃自己燈。

隱隱金烏山已入。瞳瞳玉兔海初騰。

死生代謝渾如此。何不歸依佛法僧。

### ***The Impermanence Verses for This Time (Early Evening)***

When the sun drowns, the night scene has arrived.

In a dark thoroughfare, disturbance has increased again.

Only knowing to burn candles in the houses of others,

we have not wanted to return [home] and light a lamp for ourselves yet.

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<sup>414</sup> The figure Da Yu 大愚 (Đại Ngu, n.d) may refers to the contemporary of Chan master Huang Bo 黃檗 (Hoàng Bá, d. 850). Huang Bo sent Linji 臨濟 (Lâm Tế, d. 866) to him when the latter one could not get the true teaching of Chan from him at the beginning. The story was recorded in the *Recorded Sayings of Linji* (臨濟語錄 *Lâm Tế Ngữ Lục*). Reference of spit of Đại Ngu is not found.

<sup>415</sup> “The shout of Lâm Tế” is a phrase that refers to the unique method that Chan master Linji Yixuan (臨濟義玄 *Lâm Tế Nghĩa Huyền*, d. 867) used to test his fellow students. He was famous for shouts and hits and even developed a philosophy of shouting in Chan/Thiền practice. Linji categorized four kinds of shouts as recorded in the *Recorded Sayings of Linji*. See Wu, *Golden Age of Zen*, 175.

Subtly, the Golden Crow<sup>416</sup> already descends to the mountain.

Gradually, the Jade Hare<sup>417</sup> arises from the ocean.

Life and death are muddy evolving in this way,

why not have taken refuges in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha?

### 5. The Midnight Repentance: For the Body Faculty

半<sup>418</sup>夜祝香

伏以三更漏轉。萬賴聲沉。六和緇侶會嚴壇。一辨寶香周法<sup>419</sup>界。

是香也。陰陽結聚。天地生成。栽培非一世之功。守護是百神之力。根株拔萃。久資法雨<sup>420</sup>霑濡。體質高標。長賴慈雲<sup>421</sup>庇蔭。異種莫將凡木比。清芬<sup>422</sup>不許俗人知。拈起金爐。片片纔焚於火面。結成寶蓋。層層直接於雲頭。庸陳對聖之儀。聊表通凡之信。

以今半<sup>423</sup>夜。焚香供養。

#### *The Midnight Incense Praise*

Submitted ourselves and reflect: The water clock turns into midnight;  
innumerable shades and sounds<sup>424</sup> are sinking. With six principles of reverent

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<sup>416</sup> The Golden Crow is another expression of the sun.

<sup>417</sup> The Jade Hare refers to the moon.

<sup>418</sup> *Edition 1*: 中 *trung*

<sup>419</sup> *Edition 1*: 沙 *sa*

<sup>420</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 之 *chi*

<sup>421</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 之 *chi*

<sup>422</sup> *Edition 1*: 方 *phương*

<sup>423</sup> *Edition 1*: 中 *trung*

harmony,<sup>425</sup> the venerable gather on a solemn platform. An incense burner bring fragrance to the Dharma realm.

This incense is an assembler of *yin* and *yang* which generates from earth and heaven. The [incense] is not only grown by the efforts of a generation, but also protected by the powers of numerous deities. Its root and trunk grow strong and sound because of the everlasting resource, which is imbued by the rain of Dharma. Its shape is high and beautiful, and constantly, the compassionate cloud gives it shade. Its variety is so rare that the ordinary wood is incomparable to [this incense]. Its pure fragrance is beyond common people's knowledge. Placing an incense in a golden burner: I have partially burned on the top of the incense. Its smoke forms a jeweled canopy. Layer upon layer, the smoke flies unswervingly to the clouds. We perform the ceremony in front of the sages to show our faith as we go through the mundane world. During the midnight service, we burn this incense to make an offering.

獻香偈

沉水禪林香馥郁。旃檀慧苑舊栽培。

戒刀削就聳山形。爇向心瀟長供養。

### ***The Incense Offering Verses***

The agarwood from the meditative forest has a permeating scent.

The sandalwood from the discerning garden is cultivated by ages.

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<sup>424</sup> That “innumerable shades and sounds” refers to natural sounds and images such as the sound of leaves made by wind or the sound of a flowing spring.

<sup>425</sup> Six principles of harmony (六和 *lục hòa*) are the basic for group practice in Buddhism. They include (i) living and practicing together in harmony (身和同住 *thân hòa đồng trụ*), (ii) not quarreling (口和無爭 *khẩu hòa vô tránh*), (iii) experiencing peace and happiness through cultivation in harmony (意和同悅 *ý hòa đồng duyệt*), (iv) abiding by the same precepts (戒和同修 *giới hòa đồng tu*), (v) sharing the same ideas and goals (見和同解 *kiến hòa đồng giải*), and (vi) sharing benefits in harmony (利和同均 *lợi hòa đồng quân*).

The moral knife sharpens [the incense] like the topmost mountain peak.

Burning incense, I wholeheartedly make the offering.

獻花偈

心地開時誇爛熳。諸天雨處讓芬芳。

枝七束七獻佛前。億劫業風吹不落。

*The Flower Offering Verses*

When the mind field opens, flowers flourish colorfully.

The heavenly being rain fragrant flower everywhere.

Turning into bouquets of flowers to offer in front of the Buddha.

Millions of kalpas of the karmic wind could not blow them away.

啟白 <sup>426</sup>

敬啟。十方大覺。三世雄師。舒金掌以接羣生。放玉毫 <sup>427</sup>而輝衆刹。

竊聞時應交子。夜既云中。銀釭之燈火將闌。紫陌之塵埃俱肅。幾陣風雲生  
萬里。一輪皓月浸三更。依稀而林竹節金。隱暎而庭花弄玉。怨鶴吞聲於蕙帳。哀  
猿長嘯於松開。迢迢河漢斗參橫。寂寂交原神鬼哭。子規啼切。蝴蝶夢甘。幻身孤  
寓一林中。遊夢遠奔千里外。甘被睡魔常擾擾。爭知智燭永煌煌。神舍外魄蕩魂飛。  
鬼窟中睛藏眼閉。惟多貪於睡思 <sup>428</sup>。豈識味於真如。應知一枕待天明。營甚百年  
臨命盡。

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<sup>426</sup> *Edition 1: Add 文 văn*

<sup>427</sup> *Edition 1: Add 光 quang*

<sup>428</sup> *Edition 1: 惟貪利於幻化 duy tham lợi ư huyền hóa*



諸佛子<sup>429</sup>。當念四蛇逼迫。毋忘二鼠吞侵<sup>430</sup>。輪迴三界早晚<sup>431</sup>休。繚繞四生何日了。當步往生之路。須攀引出之車。那處牢開。今宵撞破。但某甲等。謹想斯時。以爲中夜之禮。

### *Initiation*

[I] respectfully initiate to the great awakened ones of ten directions, the mighty masters of the three time periods. Stretching their golden hands to receive all sentient beings, they are sending rays of light illuminating all the worlds. I hear the turn into the time of Rat [11pm-1:00 am], already the middle of the night. Lights from the silver oil lamps are almost exhausted. Dust is cleansed completely from the purple street. Few gusts of wind and clouds blow thousands of miles. A round and luminous moon is steeping in the third night-watch.<sup>432</sup> Golden lights sifts faintly through the bamboo forest. Jade green shades play slightly on the flower courtyard. Plaintive cranes conceal their cries in curtains of lilies. Mournful apes murmur constantly at the pine gate. In the far distance, the Big Dipper and Three Stars cross the Milky Way. Quietly the spirits and ghosts weep on the fields. Eagerly the cuckoo crows,<sup>433</sup> a sweet butterfly dreams;<sup>434</sup> an

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<sup>429</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 等 *dằng*

<sup>430</sup> *Edition 1*: 侵吞 *xâm thôn*

<sup>431</sup> *Edition 3*: 曷時 *hạt thời*

<sup>432</sup> In pre-modern times, Vietnamese people followed the traditional Chinese time system in which the night was divided into five night-watches (更 *canh*) and each night-watch was 1/10 of a day or two hours and twenty-four minutes signaled by drum or gong. The third night-watch lasted from 12:00 am to 2:24 am.

<sup>433</sup> This relates to a classic reference of a king of Thục 蜀. It was said that the king lost a battle in a war and was exiled from his country. After he died, his soul transformed into a kind of bird (cuckoo). For missing his country, the bird kept crowing during summer. Its sound-*quốc quốc*-as similar as the sound of *quốc gia* (國家 *country*).

illusory body resides in [dry] wood, alone; a dreaming mind roams a thousand miles away. Resigning ourselves to the persistent disturbance of *Māra* of sleep, we have not known that the candle of understanding is always bright. Souls moving, flying spirits float outside divine abodes; eyes covered, hidden pupils are inside ghost caves. Our minds, excessively craving sleep, how could we know the taste of Suchness? Waiting for daybreak on the pillow at our will and pleasure, we have not minded facing the death after a lifetime.

Oh Buddhists! We should remember the compulsion of the four snakes;<sup>435</sup> and should not forget that the two mice<sup>436</sup> are gnawing. When will the time of being reborn cease in the three realms?<sup>437</sup> When will the four types of rebirths<sup>438</sup> linger towards cessation? We should step into the path of Pure Land and should climb up to the vehicle that will draw us out of *saṃsāra*. Wherever hell gates are, all will be destroyed tonight. All sentient beings and I sincerely contemplate this time as midnight service.

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<sup>434</sup> Butterfly dream (蝴蝶夢 *hồ điệp mộng*) is a classic reference in the *Book of Zhuangzi* (莊子 *Trang Tử*). It reads, “Once Zhuang Zhou dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn’t know he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly, he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou. But he didn’t know if he was Zhuang Zhou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou.” See Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 49.

<sup>435</sup> The four snakes symbolize for the four elements making a human body, i.e., earth, water, wind, and fire. When the four snakes are unable to live harmoniously, that human body is at the point of declining.

<sup>436</sup> The gnawing of two mice is a parable, and a Thiền kōan. The two mice, one black and one white, represent for day and night. The gnawing of two mice symbolizes for the bondage of time in a being’s life.

<sup>437</sup> The three realms are (1) the realm of desire, (2) the realm of form, and (3) the realm of formless, which are still in the circle of *saṃsāra*.

<sup>438</sup> The four kinds of birth are birth from (1) the womb, (2) egg, (3) moisture, and (4) transformation. These are the four forms that living beings are born into in the three realms and six paths.

## 懺悔身根罪

志心懺悔。臣某<sup>439</sup>等。自從無始。無量劫來。忘却本心。罔知正道。墮三塗苦。由六根非。若不懺前。難追悔後。

身根業者。父精母血<sup>440</sup>。假合成形。五臟百神。共相結聚。執爲我體。忘却法身。殺盜姪生。遂成三業。

殺生<sup>441</sup>業者。常行酷虐。不起慈仁。殘害四生。豈知一體。悞傷故殺。自作教他。或造符師。以行厭禱。或爲鴆毒。以害生靈。惟務忍人。不懷憫物。或焚山藪。或竭溪源。設網張羅。飛鷹走狗。見聞隨喜。念起想行。舉動運爲。無非是罪。

偷盜業者。見他財寶。竊起私心。擊鎖開封。探囊祛篋。見佛常住。貪計滋生。奪作家貲。不驚神怒。匪但金玉。而致重愆。及至草針。亦成盜業。

邪姪業者。心迷聲色。眼著鉛華。不顧廉貞。曲生私慾。或於淨地。佛院僧堂。近事女男。共相調<sup>442</sup>笑。弄華擲果。踏足拊肩。鑽穴踰牆。皆成姪業。

如斯等罪。無量無邊。及至命終。入于<sup>443</sup>地獄。男抱銅柱。女臥鐵床。萬劫方生。還遭罪報。若不懺悔。何以消除。今對佛前。悉皆懺悔。

懺悔已志心歸命禮十方無上三寶。

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<sup>439</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 甲 *giáp*

<sup>440</sup> *Edition 1*: 父母精血 *phụ mẫu tinh huyết*

<sup>441</sup> *Edition 1*: 如殺生 *như sát sinh*

<sup>442</sup> *Edition 1*: 謔 *hước*

<sup>443</sup> *Edition 1*: 於 *ư*

***Repentance of Transgressions Produced by Body Faculty***

With a one-pointed mind, I now repent:

I am (my name), from indefinite and immeasurable kalpas until now,  
having lost the original mind, not knowing the right path,  
having fallen into the three realms of suffering by mistaking the six sense  
faculties.

If [I do] not repent previous transgressions, it will be difficult to prevent future  
ones.

The body faculty karmas come from the father's semen and mother's blood which  
are a provisional combination of a human body.

The gathering of five vital organs<sup>444</sup> and a hundred bones in harmony assembles  
[a physical body]. When we attach to that physical body and consider it as our true body,  
we forget the Dharma body.<sup>445</sup> Since killing, stealing, and debauchery arise [from our  
physical body], the three karmas follow along.

The killing karma is:

[We] often commit the tyrannical and ruthless actions while not giving rise to [a  
heart of] compassion and benevolence. [We] slaughter four kinds of sentient beings while  
not knowing that they share the same nature with us. [We] either harm [other beings] by  
accident or kill them intentionally, doing it by ourselves or having others to do it. [We]

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<sup>444</sup> Five vital organs (五臟 *ngũ tạng*) include the heart, lung, liver, kidney, and gall.

<sup>445</sup> The Dharma body (法身 *pháp thân*) or *Dharmakāya* is one of three bodies of the Buddha in Mahāyāna Buddhism, representing the body of truth or the body that embodies the true Dharma. The term *Dharmakāya* was first mentioned in *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* in the first century BCE. Later, the Yogacāra school of Buddhism developed the theory of *trikāya* (three bodies: *Nirmanakāya*, *Sambhogakāya* and *Dharmakāya*) in the fourth century. Unlike the physical body (*Nirmanakāya*), which is impure and composed from defiled dharmas such as father's semen and mother's blood, the Dharma body is the body of truth which is pure and beyond either existence or non-existence.

either find sorcerers to get a talisman to put other people under a spell or ask them to make poisons for harming living beings. [We] are not only engaged in harming other people, but also do not feel compassion for animals. [We] either burn down ranges of mountains or dry up sources of streams, either spread or throw a casting net, either catch eagles or hunt dogs. We rejoice over whatever we have seen and heard. When attention arises, mental formation sets in motion, the turning of any motion or action [as mentioned] leads to such [killing] transgressions.

The stealing karma is:

Seeing others' money and valuables, [we] give rise to thoughts of stealing. [We] either break the locks or remove the seals; either pick pockets or take away caskets. When seeing the Saṅgha's properties, [we] give rise to thoughts of greed. [Then we] take them as [our] family's possessions while not being afraid of deities' anger. Not only do [the act of stealing] gold and jade make for a serious transgression, but also [by taking] a blade of grass and a needle [without permission], the stealing karma is formed.

The sexual misconduct karma is:

[Our] hearts are infatuated with sound and beauty; [our] eyes attach to beautiful cosmetics regardless of integrity and chastity, generating intimate thoughts of lust. Or in a pure location such as in the Buddha's shrine or Saṅgha's residence, lay men and lay women are teasing and rubbing another's shoulders. They get flowers or throw fruits; kick feet or hold shoulders; drill caves or cross over walls. All these cases form sexual misconduct karma. These transgressions are immeasurable and boundless. At the end, upon approaching our death, [we] must go to the hell where males hold copper pillars and females lie on iron beds. Only after ten thousand kalpas, can we reincarnate, while still

suffering with enduring retributions. If not repented and reformed, how can [such transgressions] be eliminated? Now, in front of the Buddha, I repent all transgressions that I have committed.

After repenting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心勸請

勸請十方三世佛。及諸菩薩聖賢僧。

廣開無量慈悲心。同證衆生登彼岸。

勸請已志心皈命禮十方无上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Exhorting***

I devotedly exhort the Buddhas in the three time periods of the ten directions, bodhisattvas, sages, and venerable masters.

Extensively expand the immeasurable and compassionate heart, with all sentient beings, [I] cross to the other shore.

After devotedly exhorting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心隨喜

我今隨佛生歡喜。昏曉虔誠禮懺因。

十地皆梯願早登。菩提真心無退轉。

隨喜已志心皈命禮十方无上三寶。

***Wholehearted Rejoicing***

I now follow Buddhas to be joyful,  
 day and night, I sincerely pray and repent the causes of transgressions.  
 Vowing to attain the ten stages of the Bodhisattva's path,  
 my true awakening mind will remain in a non-retrogressed stage.  
 After rejoicing, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the  
 unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心廻向

我等回心歸聖衆。慇懃投地禮慈尊。  
 願將功德及羣生。憑此勝因成正覺。  
 廻向已志心皈命禮十方无上三寶。

***Wholehearted Merit Transferring***

I turn my mind to the saintly Saṅgha,  
 respectfully prostrate the Compassionate One.  
 Wishing transference of merits to all beings,  
 by doing all this, a sage could become a Buddha.  
 After transferring merits, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to  
 the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心發願

一願命根速成慧。二願體相變爲真。  
 三願投崖求大法。四願赴火悟深因。  
 五願焚軀酬佛德。六願敲髓報師恩。

七願求頭終不惜。八願取目亦爲親。

九願塗香無有喜。十願割肉不生嗔。

十一願生生無著愛。十二願世世離囂塵。

發願已志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Vow Making***<sup>446</sup>

First, I vow to convert life force into wisdom quickly.<sup>447</sup>

Second, I vow to transform form and appearance into Suchness.<sup>448</sup>

Third, I vow to throw myself off the cliff for seeking the great Dharma.

Fourth, I vow to rush into the fire for illuminating the profound reason.

Fifth, I vow to burn [parts of my] body to repay the blessings of the Buddhas.<sup>449</sup>

Sixth, I vow to tear off my marrow off to reciprocate the grace of the teachers.

Seventh, I vow to offer my head without hesitation.

Eighth, I vow to tear my eyes out without wavering.

Ninth, I vow not to be fond of applying perfume or fragrance [on my body].

Tenth, I vow not to get angry at my flesh being cut off.

Eleventh, I vow not to crave sexual desire eternally.

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<sup>446</sup> In this section, all twelve vows relate to the physical body, parts of the physical body, or activities that are associated with body.

<sup>447</sup> Literally, *mệnh căn* (命根) is a source of life which refers to the physical body. The author vowed to transform his body into the body of wisdom (慧命 *huệ mệnh*).

<sup>448</sup> *Thể tướng* (體相) in this sentence is the form and appearance of the physical body. The author vowed to transform it into the body of truth (真身 *chân thân*) which is synonym of Dharma-body (法身 *Pháp thân*).

<sup>449</sup> The practice of burning of a part or parts of body to offer to Buddha appears frequently in Mahāyāna scriptures and biographies of eminent monks in Chinese literature. The body offering of Thích Quảng Đức in 1963, for Vietnam's peace and equality of Vietnamese Buddhism, is a continuation and example of this belief and tradition.



Twelfth, I vow to leave the noisy worldly world forever.

After making vows, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the  
unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

此時無常偈

萬籟聲沉後。三更鼓動初。

子規啼切切。蝴蝶夢蘊蘊 <sup>450</sup>。

甘混槐中蟻。翻爲水上魚。

不能看月起。惟愛戀花居。

迷失家千里。猶貪睡一餘 <sup>451</sup>。

不知身是幻。夢昧遇 <sup>452</sup>居諸。

***The Impermanence Verses for This Time (Midnight)***

All sounds of heavenly flute sink.

Drum of the night-watch informs the third *canh*.

Cuckoo's crow is tormenting.

Butterfly's dream is floating.

[We] resign ourselves to be ants in the locust tree,

Turning over to become fish out of water.

Being unable to see the moon rising,

[we] are only in love with flowers, <sup>453</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> *Edition 1*: 吹吹 *xuy xuy*

<sup>451</sup> *Edition 1*: 餘 *xa*

<sup>452</sup> *Edition 1*: 遇 *ngô*

<sup>453</sup> Flowers in the verses imply to the beautiful women.

then get lost thousands of miles (*li*) away from home.

Still [we] are dying to sleep late in bed,

without knowing the body is an illusion.

[Oh friends!] we are living in dreams till when!

## 6. The Dawn Repentance: For the Mind Faculty

後夜祝香

伏以。斗杓北轉。河漢西傾。枕邊之蝶夢猶甜<sup>454</sup>。樓上之角聲將斷。苾芻  
衆萃來梵席。薄伽前豫獻信香。

是香也。種從月裏移來。根向山中蟠據。標姿不俗。體質無塵。遠卑吳國之  
雀頭。高冠桂林之龜甲。爇處豈容嗔火。飄時却藉慈風。殊非下品凡馨。直是上方  
異味。細細駐遊絲而裊瑞。葱葱鬱佳氣以成祥。氤氳寶座之前。縹緲珠薨之外。回  
頭尋識。光明當<sup>455</sup>處自然生。覲面聞熏<sup>456</sup>。寂滅由茲親證得。

以今後夜。焚香供養。

### *The Later Night (Dawn) Incense Praise*

Submit ourselves and reflect: The Big Dipper turns to the North; the Milky Way  
inclines to the West. On the pillow, the butterfly's dream is still sweet; upstairs, the  
horn's sound is about to end. The Saṅgha is gathering on the Brahman mat; happily, I  
offer the designated incense to the Buddha.

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<sup>454</sup> *Edition 3*: 醒 *tỉnh*

<sup>455</sup> *Edition 1*: 知 *tri*

<sup>456</sup> *Edition 1*: 熏聞 *huân văn*

This incense is cultivated and brought from the moon. In the mountains, its roots twine and tangle. Its shape and appearance are impressive; its quality is extraordinary. Far superior to the bird head [incense]<sup>457</sup> of the Ngô state; highly surpassing the tortoiseshell [incense]<sup>458</sup> of Quế Lâm.<sup>459</sup> How could the fire of hatred possibly burn [this incense]! Its scent is floated [in the air] by means of the compassionate wind, which is not a lower grade of mundane fragrance. Yet it is a scent of the heavenly realms. Slender and thin, the flying silks make an auspicious sign; verdant and thick, the beautiful scent becomes a graceful mark. [The smoke] spirals before a jeweled seat, which floats outside of a bead curtain. I have turned my head and seek the truth. The light of this place has just radiated naturally. Face to face I smell the scent; *nirvāṇa* by now has been attained. At this late night, I burn this incense to make an offering.

獻香偈

沉水禪林香馥郁。旃檀慧苑舊栽培。

戒刀削就聳山形。爇向心瀟長供養。

### *The Incense Offering Verses*

The agarwood from the meditative forest has a permeating scent.

The sandalwood from the discerning garden is cultivated by ages.

The moral knife sharpens [the incense] like the topmost mountain peak.

Burning incense, I wholeheartedly make the offering.

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<sup>457</sup> The bird-head incense (雀頭香 *trước đầu hương*) is a type of incense made from roots of nutgrass galingale.

<sup>458</sup> The tortoiseshell incense (龜甲香 *quy giáp hương*) is a precious incense from the bark of the cinnamon tree.

<sup>459</sup> *Quế Lâm* 桂林 is a province of Southern China.

獻花偈

心地開時誇爛熳。諸天雨處讓芬芳。

枝七束七獻佛前。億劫業風吹不落。

*The Flower Offering Verses*

When the mind field opens, flowers flourish colorfully.

The heavenly beings rain fragrant flower everywhere.

Turning into bouquets of flowers to offer in front of the Buddha.

Millions of kalpas of the karmic wind could not blow them away.

啟白

敬啟 <sup>460</sup>

十方大覺。三世雄師。註甘露而濟羣飢。握神珠而頭諸暗。竊聞虬催既五。

鷄唱方三。玳筵之燭影消殘。銀漢之星躔滅沒。蝴蝶翻回於世夢。捕牢撞破於天陰

淡蟾半入碧山頭。紅日未生滄海面。古壁頻催蛩韻。御街初動馬蹄。城頭繚繞淡寒

煙。天外霏微迷曉露。適雨客朝真之際。當緇流行道之時 <sup>461</sup>。千家萬室門未開。

一夜六時功已就。忙忙世路。擾擾羣生。雖驚當夜伏枕眠。未醒終身開眼睡。

諸佛子 <sup>462</sup>。若縱終 <sup>463</sup>宵諸欲樂。便教徹曉一心昏。致此羈縻一生。由於昏

散二序。爲你直開一線道。將來留與作家看。當知人命難 <sup>464</sup>常。勿放此時蹉過。

管取眼前淨土。認來心裏 <sup>465</sup>彌陀。若能快下承當。便得箇中顯現。

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<sup>460</sup> *Edition 1: Add 文 văn*

<sup>461</sup> *Edition 1: 行 hành*

<sup>462</sup> *Edition 1: Added 等 đẳng*

<sup>463</sup> *Edition 1: 得 đắc*

但某甲等。謹想斯時。以爲後夜<sup>466</sup>之禮。

### ***Initiation***

[I] respectfully initiate to the great awakened ones of ten directions, the mighty masters of the three time periods. [May all honorable ones] sprinkle the sweet dew to save a crowd of hungry ghosts and hold the beads of deities to dispel all darkness. I hear the dragon clock striking five o'clock; the course of stars on the Milky Way has already drowned. The candle's shadows from the long feast die out; butterfly's dream becomes a lifetime's dream. A temple's bell breaks through the cloudy sky, the hare moon half sinks into the green mountain peak. The sun crow has not yet risen above the surface of the azure sea. Under the old wall, crickets sound repeatedly; on the imperial thoroughfare, horse's hooves have just clattered. In front of the town, cold smoke is curling up; outside, the morning dew is alighting. This should be the time when Daoist priests practice alchemy or Buddhist monastics practice Dharma. Every house and every gate (lit. house houses, gate gates) have not yet opened. A night and six periods of a day's service has already concluded. In the road of life, we are always in a hasty and agitated state. Despite fearing the night, we [still calmly] lie on a pillow, and despite sleeping with one eye open, [we] do not want to awaken. All these happen throughout our lifetime.

Oh Buddhists! If [we] enjoy all sorts of desire for the whole night, our minds become completely muddle-headed on the next day. Living in such a way, our whole life revolves around the bonding of the two phrases: "being confused" and "mind scattered."

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<sup>464</sup> *Edition 1*: 無 vô

<sup>465</sup> *Edition 1*: 藏 tàng

<sup>466</sup> *Edition 1*: 夜後 dạ hậu

Thinking of you, I now directly open a way and leave it for the future practitioners to examine it as well. [We] should know that human life is impermanent, so do not let time pass by in vain. Make sure that the Pure Land is in front of our eyes and recognize [the nature of] Amitābha Buddha within our minds. As soon as we practice [this method] seriously, then [Amitābha Buddha] will appear within ourselves immediately.

All sentient beings and I sincerely contemplate this time as the later night service.

懺悔意根罪

志心懺悔。臣某<sup>467</sup>等。自從無始無量劫來。失却本心。罔知正道。墮三塗苦。由六根非。若不懺前。難追悔後。

意根罪者。攀緣念慮。無暫時休。繫著情塵。封<sup>468</sup>心執相。如蠶作繭。再縛再纏。如蛾赴燈<sup>469</sup>。自燒自爛。昏迷不覺。顛倒妄生。惱亂寸心。皆由三毒。

慳貪罪者。陰謀嫉妬。恡惜蒙求。本十利千猶爲未足。財如川積。心似漏卮。隨灌隨空。故言未滿。粟紅貫腐。不濟羣<sup>470</sup>寒。綺疊羅堆。何曾振貸。得人數百。未說爲多。損己一文。翻成大耗。上自珍寶。下至絲麻。庫寶藏<sup>471</sup>盈。未嘗布施。諸種種事。晝度夜思。役思勞神。盡從貪業。

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<sup>467</sup> *Edition 1*: Add 甲 *giáp*

<sup>468</sup> *Edition 1*: 對 *đôi*

<sup>469</sup> *Edition 1*: 火 *hỏa*

<sup>470</sup> *Edition 3*: 貧 *bần*

<sup>471</sup> *Edition 3*: 倉 *thương*

嗔怒罪者。貪根爲本。嗔火自焚。怒目厲聲。焚和損氣。非惟俗輩。乃至僧流。經論干戈。互相攻擊。毀及師長。罵至爺娘<sup>472</sup>。忍草萎黃。毒焰猛熾。發言傷物。吐語害人。不念佛慈。不遵律禁。談禪似聖。對境如愚。雖<sup>473</sup>作空門。未成無我。如木生火。火發<sup>474</sup>自燒<sup>475</sup>。如此前愆。皆由嗔業。

愚癡罪者。性根頑鈍。意識昏蒙。不別尊卑。不分善惡。殺熊斷臂。砍樹傷身。罵佛招殃。唾天濕面。忘恩忘德。背義背仁。不省不思。皆愚癡業。

如斯等罪。最重最深。及至命終。墮于地獄。經億千劫。方得受生。還遭頑報。若不懺悔。何以消除。今對佛前。悉皆懺悔。

懺悔已志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

***Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Mind Faculty***

With a one-pointed mind, I now repent:

I am (my name), from indefinite and immeasurable kalpas until now,  
having lost the original mind, not knowing the right path,  
having fallen into the three realms of suffering by mistaking the six sense  
faculties.

If [I do] not repent previous transgressions, it will be difficult to prevent future  
ones.

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<sup>472</sup> *Edition 3: 孃 nương*

<sup>473</sup> *Edition 1: 難 nan*

<sup>474</sup> *Edition 1: 出 xuất*

<sup>475</sup> *Edition 1: 焚 phần*

Transgressions of the mind sense are:

When encountering to conditional objects, vague thoughts arise and carry on without any interruption. When clinging to mundane feelings, we seal our mind with perceptions. It is like when a silkworm makes its cocoon, the more bound and tangled it becomes. Like a moth to the flame, it self-immolates and falls apart. [That is when] ignorance or non-enlightenment produces delusion or illusion that disturbs and upsets the mind. All these are because of the three poisons.<sup>476</sup>

Offenses of greed: being conspiratorial and jealous; being stingy and ransacking substances. When investing ten in order to gain thousands in profits, [we feel] it is not enough still. Wealth is like a contained river, while our heart remains like a leaking jar. Therefore, no matter how much we get, [our heart] subsequently empties again, so I said, it is never fulfilled. Despite our rotten surplus grains or strings of thousand tainted coins, [we] do not help to the poor. Silks and garments are heaped up together; have you ever given some to others? Gaining hundreds from others, [we] still say that it is not much. All the while losing a coin, [we think] it is spending a lot. [We have] a storehouse full of treasures and jewels or a granary filled with thread and hemp, yet we have never practiced generosity. We measure and contemplate over day and night. Our minds are bothered and full of worry. All this is because of karmic activities of craving.

Offenses of aversion: Its root originates from greed; fire of anger is burning us. Having a glaring look and a stern sound, [we easily] ruin peace and harmony. Not only with the vulgar, but also with the monastics, [we fully] engage in polemical debates

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<sup>476</sup> Three poisons (三毒 *tam độc*) are greed, hatred, and ignorance.



regarding scriptures and treatise,<sup>477</sup> and we criticize with each other, [even] defaming teachers and scolding our parents. The grass of tolerance withers; the poisonous flame blazes formidably. [We] hurt animals by making a statement, harm people by uttering a speech. Neither remembering the Buddha's compassion nor observing the forbidden precepts, [we] discuss Thiền like the sages, while facing to external objects like the ignorant. Despite residing in the house of emptiness,<sup>478</sup> [we] have not attained the practice of no-self.<sup>479</sup> It is as though [part of] a tree would make a fire, and then fire starts out to burn the tree itself. All these preceding transgressions are because of karmic activities of aversion.

Offences of ignorance: The original nature is ignorant; our consciousness is illusory. [We] neither differentiate seniors and juniors nor distinguish between good and evil. Killing a bear, our arms are broken; chopping down a tree, our body is wounded. Insulting Buddhas, [we] incur calamity; spitting into the sky, our faces get wet.<sup>480</sup> Be ungrateful and forgetful of others' kindness, [we] turn our backs to the righteous and benevolent ones. [We] are neither aware of, nor consider things. All these are because of karmic activities of ignorance.

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<sup>477</sup> Referring to Buddhist scriptures and treatises as collected in Tripitaka.

<sup>478</sup> Emptiness (空 *không*) is derived from the Sanskrit word *śūnyatā* meaning absent or devoid of ontological features of the ultimate essence of things or beings. This concept appears in various Buddhist traditions, and much frequently in Mahāyāna scriptures such as *Madhyamika* or *Prajñāpāramitā* literatures. This concept links to the teaching of dependent co-arising, no-self, tathāgata-garbha, Buddha nature, etc.

<sup>479</sup> The doctrine of no-self (無我 *vô ngã*) is one of the three characteristics of existence (三法印 *tam pháp ấn*) which include: impermanence, suffering, and no-self. Many Buddhist traditions believe that all dharmas has co-arise and depend on one another. The physical body that one has is also a harmonious existence of five aggregates. The *Discourse on the Characteristic of No-self* (*Anattālakkaṇasutta*, SN. 22.59) and *Discourse on the Snake Simile* (*Alagaddūpamasutta*, MN. 22) are important early scriptures presenting characteristics of the doctrine of no-self in Buddhism.

<sup>480</sup> Reference from the *Sūtra of Forty-two Chapters* (四十二章經 *Tứ Thập Nhị Chương Kinh*), T. no. 784, vol. 17, p.722b22-23.

All these transgressions are packed and extremely deep-rooted. As we approach to the ends of our lives, we will fall into the hell realm. Passing through countless kalpas, [we] can reincarnate. Even if reborn, [we] still suffer the retribution of ignorance. If not repented and reformed, how could these transgressions be eliminated? Now, in front of the Buddha, I repent them all.

After repenting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心勸請

勸請十方三世佛。及諸菩薩聖賢僧。

廣開無量慈悲心。同證衆生登彼岸。

勸請已志心皈命禮十方无上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Exhorting***

I devotedly exhort the Buddhas in the three time periods of the ten directions, bodhisattvas, sages, and venerable masters.

Extensively expand the immeasurable and compassionate heart, with all sentient beings, [I] cross to the other shore.

After devotedly exhorting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心隨喜

我今隨佛生歡喜。昏曉虔誠禮懺因。

十地皆梯願早登。菩提真心無退轉。

隨喜已志心皈命禮十方无上三寶。

***Wholehearted Rejoicing***

I now follow Buddhas to be joyful,  
 day and night, I sincerely pray and repent the causes of transgressions.  
 Vowing to attain the ten stages of the Bodhisattva's path,  
 my true awakening mind will remain in a non-retrogressed stage.  
 After rejoicing, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the  
 unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心廻向

我等回心歸聖衆。慇懃投地禮慈尊。  
 願將功德及羣生。憑此勝因成正覺。  
 廻向已志心皈命禮十方无上三寶。

***Wholeheartedly Merit Transferring***

I revolve my mind to the saintly Saṅgha,  
 respectfully prostrate the Compassionate One.  
 Wishing transference of merits to all beings,  
 by doing all this, a sage could become a Buddha.  
 After transferring merits, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to  
 the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

志心發願

一願靈源常湛寂。二願藏識絕攀緣。  
 三願疑團俱破碎。四願定月永團圓。  
 五願法塵忘起滅。六願愛罔離拘牽。

七願思惟行十地。八願諦聽舍三天。

九願心猿休掉臂。十願意馬息揚鞭。

十一願寬懷諸佛教。十二願適興祖師禪。

發願已志心皈命禮十方無上三寶。

### ***Wholehearted Vow Making***

First, I vow that my original mind<sup>481</sup> is always clear and tranquil.

Second, I vow that my store consciousness<sup>482</sup> stops grasping for external objects.

Third, I vow all doubts and suspicions are entirely shattered.

Fourth, I vow the *samādhi* moon<sup>483</sup> is always perfectly round.

Fifth, I vow all worldly dharmas are free from birth and death.

Sixth, I vow to tear down the net of sensual desires.

Seventh, I vow to contemplate and practice the ten stages [of the Bodhisattva path].

Eighth, I vow to obtain the divine hearing<sup>484</sup> beyond the three realms.<sup>485</sup>

Ninth, I vow that my monkey-like mind ceases to wander.

Tenth, I vow that my horse-like intention stops roaming.

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<sup>481</sup> Literally, *linh nguyên* 靈源 is translated as original spirit or spiritual source [of a being]. In this case, the original mind refers to the Buddha nature of every sentient being.

<sup>482</sup> The store consciousness (藏識 *tạng thức*) is the sixth consciousness in the teaching of Yogācāra school. It is also called *ālaya* consciousness (阿賴耶識 *A lai da thức*) in which all seeds either wholesome or unwholesome are stored and would manifest themselves in accordance with proper conditions.

<sup>483</sup> *Samādhi* moon (定月 *định nguyệt*) implies the complete and perfect nature of our original minds.

<sup>484</sup> Divine hearing (諦聽 *đế thính*) is a magical power that an awakened one would obtain.

<sup>485</sup> The three realms include the realm of desire (欲界 *dục giới*), realm of form (色界 *sắc giới*), and realm of formless (無色界 *vô sắc giới*).

Eleventh, I vow to open my heart to listen to the Buddha-Dharma.

Twelfth, I vow to be devoted to the Thiền teachings of the Patriarchs.

After making vows, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

此時無常偈

法鼓擊回浮世夢。梵鍾撞破大家聲。

猶貪北首眠甜黑。不管東顏<sup>486</sup>日照紅。

長夜漫漫時有旦。冥途默默路難通。

今朝若不勤行道。他日那逢黃面公。

***This Time (Dawn) Impermanence Verses***

The Dharma Drum strikes away the dream of the impermanent world.

The Brahman Heaven's Bell sounds to break the deafness of people.

Turning heads to the North, we still crave sound sleep.

While facing East, the sun already shines brightly.

The dawn finally comes after an endless night.

The road is dark, the path is hard to travel.

If we do not practice the Dharma diligently now,

how could we meet the Honorable One<sup>487</sup> another day?

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<sup>486</sup> *Edition 1*: 頭 頭

<sup>487</sup> Literally, *hoàng diện công* 黃面公 is translated as golden face man. In this case, that refers to the Buddha.

太宗皇帝勸衆偈

生老病死。理之常然。

欲求解脫。解縛牽纏。

迷而求佛。惑而求禪。

禪也不求。杜口忘言。

***Admonition of Emperor Thái Tông***

Birth and old age, sickness, and death  
are conventional truths.

[Despite] wishing to attain the ultimate liberation,  
we untie bondage, but become entangle with burdens.

[It is like] finding the Buddha out of ignorance,  
or seeking for Thiền out of confusion.

Is it impossible that Thiền could be sought?

Remain silent and forget the words.

## Chapter Six:

### *Analysis of the Procedure*

This chapter provides a thorough examination of the *Procedure* in the framework of Vietnamese repentance literature. In dealing with the development of repentance rituals and practices in Vietnamese Buddhism, we are faced with scant evidence. There are virtually no Vietnamese studies or writings regarding this topic. What I mean by “Vietnamese repentance literature” in this chapter includes repentance scriptures and texts as mentioned in Vietnamese Buddhist compositions such as *Thiền Uyển* and TĐL, as well as relevant repentance rituals that circulate among Vietnamese Buddhist communities in the present day. Some examples of those pertinent repentance rituals include the LHBS, TBTS, *Hồng Danh Bửu Sám*, and the *Repentance of the Six Sense Faculties* of the Neo-Trúc Lâm Thiền school of Thích Thanh Từ.

The reading of *Thiền Uyển* serves as an important source for understanding the early stages of the circulation of Mahāyāna sūtras, including repentance texts in Vietnamese Buddhism.<sup>488</sup> Some major Buddhist scriptures such as the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Diamond Sūtra*, the *Perfect Enlightenment Sūtra*, the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, or the *Smaller and Larger Sukhāvātī-vyūha Sūtras* were popular among the Vietnamese Buddhists of

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<sup>488</sup> For example, we would know the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Kinh Pháp Hoa* in Vietnamese) was popular because it was mentioned as main practice of Thông Biện (d. 1134) to the point that he was named as Ngô Pháp Hoa because Ngô was his family name. Minh Tâm (d. 1034) and Bảo Tính (d. 1034) chanted the *Lotus Sūtra* for ten years continuously. Chân Không (1046-1100) was said to have preached the *Lotus Sūtra* many times. Similarly, Thanh Biện (d. 686) observed the *Diamond Sūtra* in eight years without interruption; Đại Xá (1120-1180) recited the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* and the *Samantabhadra Mantra*; Minh Trí (d. 1196) preached the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Perfect Enlightenment Sūtra*, *Records of the Lamp*; Tịnh Lực (1112-1175) specialized in the *Perfect Enlightenment Sūtra*, and so forth.

the early and medieval periods.<sup>489</sup> Therefore, there was a high chance that some repentance scriptures related to those sūtras were circulating in Vietnam as well. These may have included the *Sūtra on Contemplation of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Method of Cultivation Spoken by the Buddha* (*Contemplation of Samantabhadra*) 佛說觀普賢菩薩行法經,<sup>490</sup> the *Lotus Samādhi Repentance* (*Lotus Repentance*) 法華三昧懺儀,<sup>491</sup> the *Manual of Procedures for the Cultivation of Realization of Ritual Practice according to the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment* (*Perfect Enlightenment*) 圓覺經道場修證儀,<sup>492</sup> the *Sarvavaidalyasaṃgraha Sūtra* 大乘方廣總持經,<sup>493</sup> and the *Great Compassion Repentance* 大悲懺法. These repentance scriptures all referred to the tradition of observing the repentance during the six time periods of the day.

The account of Vinītaruci in *Thiền Uyển* suggests that his translation of the *Sarvavaidalyasaṃgraha Sūtra* is the earliest canonical reference of the existence of repentance texts and practices in Vietnamese Buddhism.<sup>494</sup> Vinītaruci translated the *Sarvavaidalyasaṃgraha Sūtra* in 580 when he resided in Pháp Vân Buddhist Temple and

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<sup>489</sup> While the Chinese Buddhist Canon had circulated among the Vietnamese community centuries before and after the time of the *Procedure*, I shall turn to some repentance scriptures that were prominent in medieval Vietnam. The reasons for my choice here are based on dates of these scriptures and how popular they were in Vietnam.

<sup>490</sup> T. no. 227, vol. 9.

<sup>491</sup> T. no. 1941, vol. 46.

<sup>492</sup> X. no. 1475, vol. 74.

<sup>493</sup> T. no. 275, vol. 9.

<sup>494</sup> *Dasheng fangguang zongchi jing* 大乘方廣總持經, T. no. 275, vol. 9. This translation is said to have been completed after Vinītaruci settled at Pháp Vân temple of Jiaozhou (Vietnam) in 580 CE as recorded in the *Thiền Uyển* (p.44b1). The *Mahāyāna Vaipulya Dhāraṇī Sūtra* was first translated into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (231-308?) entitled 佛說濟諸方等學經 *Đại Thừa Tế Chư Phương Đẳng Học Kinh* (T. no. 274, vol. 9). See Lê, *Trần Thái Tông*, 276; Đức Nhuận. *Đạo Phật*, 78.



propagated Buddhism in Vietnam until his death. The repentance of the six sense faculties is among the contents of this sūtra. It says, “Day and night, throughout the six intervals of a day, one should repent all transgressions that are committed by the three karmic sources of body, speech and mind.”<sup>495</sup> The *Sarvavaidalyasaṃgraha Sūtra* states that the Buddha himself also practiced this method of repentance. This line goes along with Trần Thái Tông’s statement in the *Preface to the Procedure*. It reads, “I then searched and pondered over them again, to make sure that all karmas collected are completely [generated] from the six sense faculties. That’s why, before Shakyamuni Buddha attained Buddhahood, he had to spend six years of practicing ascetism in the Himalayas: because of the six sense faculties.”<sup>496</sup> Suffice it to say, Trần Thái Tông had perused the *Sarvavaidalyasaṃgraha Sūtra* when he composed the *Procedure*, and he possibly got the idea of dividing the repentance activities into six intervals of a day from this sūtra.

The *Procedure* was a daily-based repentance ritual. It suggested that practitioners perform the repenting of the six sense faculties throughout six intervals during the day, i.e., (i) morning, (ii) noon or midday, (iii) late afternoon, (iv) early night, (v) midnight, and (vi) late night or dawn. Such a division was in accordance with daily worship of general monastic procedures of Mahāyāna Buddhist institutions (六時禮佛 *lục thời lễ Phật*).<sup>497</sup> In the *Procedure*, the six intervals of a day must be in proportion to the

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<sup>495</sup> T. no. 275, vol. 9, p.0383a1-a2.

<sup>496</sup> *Essays*: 35b.

<sup>497</sup> Julian F. Pas has a broad discussion of this modality of procedure in Mahāyāna Buddhism based on historical and literary sources in which she concludes that the procedure of worship in six time periods became popular generally from the middle of the eighth century in India, at least among the Mahāyānists. See Pas, “Six Daily Periods,” 71.

repenting practices of each sense faculty. Therefore, the text is divided into six sections corresponding with the six sense faculties or the six divisions of a day.

## I. Structure

The *Procedure* is divided into six parts accordingly. In this study, I have added some titles or subtitles to the text for an easier reading and they are noted. The morning repentance of the eye faculty has eleven items as follows.

- i. Admonition to the Saṅgha Verses at the Time of Tiger
- ii. Morning Incense Praise
- iii. Incense Offering Verses
- iv. Flower Offering Verses
- v. Initiation
- vi. Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Eye Faculty
- vii. Wholehearted Exhorting
- viii. Wholehearted Rejoicing
- ix. Wholehearted Merit Transferring
- x. Wholehearted Vow Making
- xi. Morning Impermanence Verses

In the midday repentance of the ear faculty, the first item is eliminated, and the following ten items go along with the midday as the time of repenting, and ear faculty as the sense that is being repented. Five items are repeated throughout the *Procedure*, i.e., (i) Incense Offering Verses, (ii) Flower Offering Verses, (iii) Wholehearted Exhorting, (iv) Wholehearted Rejoicing, and (v) Wholehearted Merit Transferring.

The sundown of the nose faculty has ten items, similar to the preceding one. To the early evening repentance of the tongue faculty, two more items are added before the “Early Evening Incense Praise,” i.e., (i) Evening Admonition to the Saṅgha Verses, and (ii) Eight Kinds of Suffering Verses. These two items are missing from the midnight repentance of the body faculty and the late night or dawn repentance of the mind faculty.

At the end of the *Procedure*, the King wrote his own admonition to all Buddhist practitioners. Reading this admonition, it seemed less connected with the ritualized process of the *Procedure*. It was possibly written around the time Trần Thái Tông wrote the *Equal Ritual of the Repentance Texts* (henceforth referred to as the *Equal Ritual*), due to their contents. Both the *Equal Ritual* and the admonition emphasized the ultimate truth and the non-duality of Buddhist teachings rather than teachings related to the physical body, such as the six sense faculties in the *Procedure* or the four stages (birth, old-age, sickness, and death) of the body in the *Chants on the Four Mountains*. However, I provide a translation of this admonition along with the *Procedure* due to its arrangement in all available extant editions of the *Essays*.

## II. Date

Trần Thái Tông wrote two repentance rituals including the *Procedure* and the *Equal Ritual*. In addition, there were also some texts related to the five precepts and the four stages of human life, which showed that upholding Buddhist precepts and practicing repentance were important to the King throughout his lifetime. The *Procedure* remained intact through hundreds of years while most of the *Equal Ritual*-except its preface-was lost. From this preface, I would suggest that the *Equal Ritual* was likely a repentance text at the noumenal level-via some forms of contemplative practice-while the *Procedure* was concerned with the phenomenal level as it focused primarily on the six sense faculties of the physical body.

There is no record for when the *Procedure* and the *Equal Ritual* were written. Based on the prefaces of both texts, it is likely that the King wrote them while he was still on the throne, probably after his encounter with the National Preceptor Trúc Lâm at

Mount Yên Tử in 1236. In the preface of the *Procedure*, the King wrote: “In my leisure time after resolving state affairs, I frequently read the Buddhist sūtras, treatises, and rituals to collect and compile a ritual manual useful for myself and for others.”<sup>498</sup>

Similarly, the preface of the *Equal Ritual* reads, “Regardless of my busy schedule, I have carefully read the profound scriptures of the Tripiṭaka whenever I have spare time. When I have met this Dharma directly pointing a way for human beings to attain Buddhahood.”<sup>499</sup> The expression of “leisure time after resolving state affairs” or “the spare time during my busy schedule” refers to the period when Trần Thái Tông was still on the throne. The King wrote the *Procedure* as soon as he returned to the capital city from Mount Yên Tử in 1236.

### III. Components of the *Procedure*

As a daily-based repentance ritual, the *Procedure* demands a high level of persistence and dedication from practitioners. They should always keep their minds alert for afflictions or defilements caused by the perpetual contact of the six sense faculties and the six kinds of external objects. The text is meant to be concise, so as to keep individuals focused on their practice and develop persistence, as Trần Thái Tông noted in the preface of the *Procedure*. He said:

The more I write, the more my writings become redundant. The more I talk, the more my words would deviate from the true meaning. If my words are too complicated, people would be [burdened], and too lazy to apply my method into [their] practice. If the meaning is unclear, people start to doubt. Therefore, I would not fill the book with ornate or flowery words. Yet [I would like] the

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<sup>498</sup> *Trẫm dĩ thị sự, tải chi vu hoài, bi cảm tập giao, xan tâm vong phế. Dĩ thỉnh chính chi dư hạ, biên duyệt kinh luận cập chư nghi văn. Soạn tập tự lợi lợi tha chi pháp.* 朕以是事。載之于懷。悲感集交。餐寢忘廢。以聽政之餘暇。徧閱經論及諸儀文。撰集自利利他之法。 (*Essays*: 35b).

<sup>499</sup> *Trẫm dĩ vạn kỉ chi dư hạ, duyệt tam tạng chi thậm thâm. Ngộ thủ pháp môn trực chỉ nhân trung tác Phật.* 朕以萬幾之餘暇。閱三藏之甚深。遇此法門直止人中作佛。 (*Essays*: 36b-37a).

people who read and recite [the rituals] to be happy, and that those who see and listen will understand easily.<sup>500</sup>

No matter how concise and straightforward the *Procedure* is, it appears to be a liturgical ritual for chanting purposes. Therefore, components of the text present as steps of repentance performance on each sense faculty as mentioned in the structure section of the text. They are (i) admonition, (ii) incense and flower offerings, (iii) incense praise, (iv) initiation, (v) repentance of the sense faculties, (vi) imploring the Buddhas, (vii) sympathetic rejoicing, (viii) transferring merits, (ix) making vows, and (x) impermanence verses.

These ten steps are consistent throughout the text, outlining a detailed and thorough procedure for the repentance performance of the six sense faculties. Procedures of repentance scriptures can vary depending on who composed them. For instance, the *Lotus Samādhi Repentance* has ten stages in which repentance of the six sense faculties is one stage.<sup>501</sup> The five later steps include repentance (*chanhui*), imploring the Buddhas to remain in the world to teach (*quanqing*), sympathetic rejoicing (*suixi*), dedication of merits (*huixiang*), making vows (*fayuan*) making the “five-fold repentance” (*wuhui*) of the Tiantai tradition.<sup>502</sup> These fivefold steps appear in the *Procedure* as the fifth through ninth steps. Trần Thái Tông did not specifically state if he took the structure of the *Lotus Samādhi Repentance* as a reference, yet he did mention that he perused the Buddhist

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<sup>500</sup> Văn tắc văn phồn, ngôn tắc ngôn viễn. Dẫn văn phồn tắc sám đọa, ngôn viễn tắc nghi sinh. Có bất cấu ư phù từ. Giả doanh quyển trục, sử độc tụng giả giai hân, văn kiến giả dị ngộ. 文則文繁。言則言遠。但文繁則懺惰。言遠則疑生。故不構於浮詞。假盈卷軸。使讀誦者皆欣。聞見者易悟。(Essays: 36a).

<sup>501</sup> McGuire, *Living Karma*, 60.

<sup>502</sup> See note 501 above.

canon to compose this ritual. Therefore, there is the possibility that he came across this popular Tiantai repentance scripture.

#### IV. Textual Analysis

A thorough review of the structure of the *Procedure* suggests that the central themes of this text include (i) the modality of six periods of daily repentance, (ii) admonition and impermanence verses, (iii) veneration and initiation, and (iv) the five-fold steps of repenting activities.

##### 1. The Modality of Six Periods of Daily Repentance

The modality of six intervals of daily worship is a general procedure within Buddhist monasticism. This appears in Buddhist scriptures, monastic regulations, treatises, commentaries, biographical collections of Buddhist monks, and even in popular works. Variant expressions of the six periods of a day in Mahāyāna Buddhist texts include “six intervals of day and night” (晝夜六時), “six periods of time in a day” (日夜之中六時/日日六時/每日六時), “a day and a night” (一日一夜), “three time periods of the day and three time periods of the night” (夜三時晝三時/夜三晝三六時). A digital search of the term “six intervals/periods” (六時) reveals its appearance in more than one thousand paragraphs in over fifty texts of the Chinese Buddhist canons. This result is fascinating and shows that the custom of observing the worship during six intervals of a day is undoubtedly widespread in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

According to Julian F. Pas, the custom started in India and was transmitted to Central Asia and China. During the seventh century, the custom was very popular among

Indian Buddhists, but it is impossible to trace its origin.<sup>503</sup> The literary and historical analysis of Julian F. Pas also proves that the tradition of observing the practices during six intervals of a day went beyond Buddhist sects or schools, either Vinaya, Pure Land, Esoteric, or Meditation Buddhist schools. There was no clear distinction in the popularity of this custom between the Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism. However, Mahāyāna texts emphasized this feature since the early stages of development of Chinese Buddhism. The main emphasis of this custom was to adhere to the practice unceasingly.

The division of six time periods applies to three major contexts, i.e., daily worship (禮佛), confession and repentance (禮懺/懺悔), and circumambulation (行道) in Buddhist monasteries. In repentance scriptures where dedication and a high sense of continuity are required, many texts suggest that cultivators practice throughout the six time periods of day and night, and the repentance activities are combined with either worship or circumambulation. The *Procedure* of Trần Thái Tông highlights the repentance element, repeated at all six time periods, followed by admonition, initiation to the Buddhas, and worship.

Although the idea of observing repentance in six time periods of a day and night is key in many repentance scriptures, the *Procedure* is the only extant text that followed the idea completely by dividing the text into six sections in accordance with six time periods of repentance performance. Such a division goes along with the six sense faculties, making the whole text internally aligned with the structure. Making sure of online search technology, I have scanned the online versions of the Tripiṭaka using some search key words such as “六根,” “懺悔,” “禮懺,” “六根懺悔,” “六根懺法,” and “六根

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<sup>503</sup> Pas, “Six Daily Periods,” 71.

懺.” The results may range from thousands to hundreds, then to dozens of matches, depending on the key words. By scanning the contents of these matches, I was able to determine that none of these texts shares the identical structure with the *Procedure*. However, the three fragments of Dunhuang texts called the *Writing of Repentance Ritual* 禮懺文 numbered 2854, 2855, and 2856 in volume 85 of the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*<sup>504</sup> do provide some hints that these texts offer a procedure for repenting in different intervals of a day and night.

For instance, the *T. 2854* includes the *Sunset Impermanent Verses* (黃昏無常偈 *hoàng hôn vô thường kệ*)<sup>505</sup>, the *Early Night Impermanence Verses* (初夜無常偈 *sơ dạ vô thường kệ*)<sup>506</sup> and the *Verses of Purification at the time of Tiger* (寅朝清淨偈 *Dần triều thanh tịnh kệ*)<sup>507</sup>. Obviously, the *T. 2854* at least indicates the three times of worshipping in Buddhist monasteries: sundown, early night, and late night. Because *T.2854* is incomplete, it is possible that the other three time periods of worshipping are missing. Furthermore, the *Procedure* has the impermanence verses in each section of repenting of the six sense faculties. During the time of Tiger, there are the verses of admonition in the *Procedure* instead of the verses of purification found in the Dunhuang text. These similarities raise the possibility that there were repentance scriptures that shared the same or similar structure as the *Procedure*. However, until we have more

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<sup>504</sup> The three texts have shared the same names and are called *Writing of Repentance Ritual* 禮懺文. They were found at Dunhuang caves and listed by Takakusu Junjiro in volume 85 of the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*. There are some parts missing from these three texts. However, their structures and components share some similarities to the *Procedure*. I am indebted to Lê Mạnh Thát's studies of Trần Thái Tông for this finding. See Lê, *Trần Thái Tông*, 277-278.

<sup>505</sup> T. no. 2854, vol. 85, p.1303c26.

<sup>506</sup> T. no. 2854, vol. 85, p.1304a01.

<sup>507</sup> T. no. 2854, vol. 85, p.1304b10.



evidence, the *Procedure* remains the only repentance rituals that makes the repentance activities of each sense faculty consistent with the six time periods of a day.

## 2. Admonition and Impermanence Verses

Admonition plays as encouragement by the elders to the younger fellows in the Buddhist Saṅgha. In modern Vietnamese Buddhism, the *Admonition of Chan Master Dayuan of Mount Gui* (潯山大圓禪師警策文 *Quy Sơn Đại Viên Thiền Sư Cảnh Sách Văn*) is popular among Vietnamese Buddhists. Studying this text is a compulsory for all young novices. They must memorize the text and be tested on it before receiving full ordination. Following that custom, many translations of the text into Vietnamese language have been conducted and circulated among Vietnamese communities either in Vietnam or abroad. A series of five volumes of the *Admonition at Mount Phụng Hoàng* (*Phụng Hoàng Cảnh Sách*), written by Thích Thanh Từ, was published during 1990s and 2000s as an effort to revive the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect in the late twentieth century. The existence of both the *Admonition of Chan Master Dayuan of Mount Gui* and the *Admonition at Mount Phụng Hoàng* demonstrates that writings of admonition are an important genre of Vietnamese Buddhist literature.

In the *Procedure*, Trần Thái Tông wrote three pieces of admonition. All of them are in verse. The first one is chanted at the time of Tiger (寅時警策衆偈 *Dần thời cảnh sách chúng kệ*), the second one is chanted before the evening repentance (黃昏勸衆偈 *Hoàng hôn khuyến chúng kệ*), and the third one is chanted at the end of the repentance activities throughout six time periods of a day and night (太宗皇帝勸衆偈 *Thái Tông Hoàng đế khuyến chúng kệ*). If the third piece of admonition plays as a conclusion of the whole day's repentance performance, the first one is given in the early morning and the

second one is given in the early evening repenting sections, which maintains an appropriate balance of the text.

Regarding style and content, these pieces of admonition are in line with the *Impermanence Verses* at the end of each repentance section. They all start with the changing of the sky, time, or weather. Accordingly, there are changes at different stages of human life and throughout the process of decaying of body and mind. The author then encourages and urges everyone to practice the Buddhist teachings in order to attain liberation. In the *Admonition at the time of Tiger*, Trần Thái Tông wrote:

The sun is about to shine brightly.  
The darkness of the earth is slowly illuminated.  
Mind is clinging to all sorts of external objects.  
Eyes are dazzled with colors in muddle.  
Without a desire to cherish the foul body,  
but we have a will of lifting the buried head.  
Solicitously contemplating on the six-fold remembrances,  
we then may obtain the truth to come.<sup>508</sup>

The *Evening Admonition* follows in a similar manner:

The brightness inclines over the elm and mulberry trees.  
The sun is sinking down to the mountains west.  
It is hard to hold time back forever,  
while old age and sickness come after us unquestionably.  
When death arrives, who could yearn for life?  
When the time comes, who could withstand death?  
We all, therefore, must concentrate  
and keep our minds free from sloth, torpor, and restlessness.<sup>509</sup>

Obviously, these lines are not so different from the impermanence verses at the end of each section of repenting of six sense faculties as they also use metaphors of the changing of seasons, natural signs, as well as different stages of human life. Using these

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<sup>508</sup> *Essays*: 55a.

<sup>509</sup> *Essays*: 70b.

metaphors, the King urges religious dedication and cultivation. For example, in the *Early Evening Impermanence Verses*, the King wrote:

When the sun drowns, the night scene has arrived.  
 In a dark thoroughfare, disturbance has increased again.  
 Only knowing to burn candles in the houses of others,  
 we have not wanted to return [home] and light a lamp for ourselves yet.  
 Subtly, the Golden Crow already descends the mountain.  
 Gradually, the Jade Hare arises from the ocean.  
 Life and death are indistinctly evolving in this way,  
 why not have taken refuges in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha?<sup>510</sup>

Apparently, the style and language are quite similar in the admonition and impermanence verses throughout the *Procedure*. While the admonition plays as a beginning of a repentance section, the impermanence verses function as sub-conclusion of each section of repentance practice. They both function as encouragements to the cultivators.

### 3. Veneration and Initiation

To venerate the Triple Gem, each section of repentance starts with the *Incense Praise* and *Verses of Incense and Flower Offerings*. The *Incense Praise* gives the context for the repentance of each sense faculty in every division of a day and praises how the preciousness or rarity of the incense so that one may be inclined to express his gratitude to the Triple Gem. The *Verses of Incense and Flower Offerings* are repeated in each section of the repentance activities throughout the six time periods of the *Procedure*. The *Incense Praise* and the *Verses of Incense and Flower Offerings* function as veneration to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and the saintly ones of the ten directions through the three time periods-past, present, and future. This also creates a sacred and purified environment for the repentance performance or worship in general.

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<sup>510</sup> *Essays*: 76a.

After making offerings, the penitent performs a ritual of initiation to “the great awakened one of the ten directions, and mighty masters of the three time periods” who are identified with numerous Buddhas in Mahāyāna Buddhism. The initiation is written in parallel constructions, creating a sense of urgency. In each section of repenting, Trần Thái Tông presents a series of images and observations that show how time passes and how things changed in the world in accordance with a specific time of a day in the six time periods. Another series of images shows a secondary level of observation, in other words, how one’s sense organs and mind react to such an external world that leads one toward suffering and farther away from the path of liberation. Following that, the King urges his fellow Buddhists to reflect deeply and cultivate diligently for the sake of ultimate awakening. When the contemplation concludes, the penitent would pay homage to the Buddhas with wholehearted mind and initiated the repentance ritual in such-and-such time. This provides contemplation and rationale for the repentance practices.

#### 4. The Five-fold Steps of Repenting Activities

As mentioned earlier, the five-fold steps of repenting activities (repentance, imploring the buddhas, sympathetic rejoicing, dedication of merits, and making vows) were listed by Zhiyi, the founder of Tiantai school of Buddhism in China.<sup>511</sup> It is also called the five-fold steps of repentance during the six time periods of a day and night (*liushi wuhui* 六時五悔) as written in the *Lotus Samādhi Repentance* and the *Great Calming and Contemplation* (*Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀). Based on the idea of repenting during the six time periods of a day and night, the five-fold steps of repentance are also

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<sup>511</sup> Zhiyi had synthesized the five-fold steps of repentance from the early repentance scriptures such as *Mile pusa suowen jing* 彌勒菩薩所問經 (T. no. 1525, vol. 26), *Zhan cha shan’e bao jing* 占察善惡業報經 (T. no. 839, vol. 17), *Foshuo guan Puxian Pusa xing fa jing* 佛說觀普賢菩薩行法經 (T. no. 277, vol. 9), and others.

relevant in the Dunhuang text (*T. 2854*)<sup>512</sup> as well as the *Procedure*. In the five-fold steps of repentance activities of the *Procedure*, the three middle parts are in verse and repeated in every section of the repentance ritual. The parts of repentance and vow making correspond with the six sense faculties.

(i) *Repentance* (*chanhui* 懺悔)

Repentance is the main concept of the *Procedure*. Along with the six time periods of a day and night, penitents repent their six sense faculties starting with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The writing style is consistent with the other prose passages of the *Procedure* such as the *Incense Praises* and the *Initiations*. The language is concise and straight to the point. At the beginning of the repenting of each sense faculty, the King writes:

With a one-pointed mind, I now repent:  
I am (my name), from indefinite and immeasurable kalpas until now,  
having lost the original mind, not knowing the right path,  
having fallen into the three realms of suffering by mistaking the six sense  
faculties.  
If [I do] not repent previous transgressions, it will be difficult to prevent future  
ones.<sup>513</sup>

This part is repeated in every section of the repentance of each sense faculty throughout the text. It plays as an introduction of the repentance. The King then lists offenses or transgressions that would be committed by the sense faculties when they make contact with the six corresponding external objects. Although this is the central theme of the text, it is not drawn out and rather succinct. The particular point here is that the sense faculties and their (mal)functions are expressed from different angles in every

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<sup>512</sup> The *T. 2854* was composed by Monk XinYuan 辛願 (n.d) of Daxuan Buddhist Temple 大玄寺 in the second year of Xiande Era (955) which was close to the time that the *Procedure* was composed. See *T. no. 2854*, vol 85, p.1304b17-18.

<sup>513</sup> *Essays*: 58a.

single sentence. To take the repentance of the eye faculty as an example, Trần Thái Tông wrote:

The eye faculty karmas are:

Regard for evil causes that have ripened, [we] look down on [doing] wholesome deeds, paying attention to the illusory flower by mistake, and neglecting the original moon.

Love and hate arise, good and bad appearances fight against each other.

Delusion is produced in a glance; the right view is blindingly dazzling.

White comes, blue goes; purple is right, yellow is wrong.

Looking at everything incorrectly, it is not different from the blind.

Encountering beautiful persons, stare at them without a blink.

Confusing the past lives, [we] forget about our own original face.

Seeing others' wealth and properties, stare with the largely open eyes.

Encountering the poor, [we] turn a blind eye on their miserable life.

Seeing the stranger's death, shed no drop of tear.

Passing away of the relatives, [we] break our own heart.

Seeing the Triple Gem, entering the Buddhist temple,

facing the Buddha images and scriptures, [we] take no notice.

In the Buddha's Hall or in the Saṅgha's residence,

men and women: date, exchange loves, and express sensual desires.

We show no respect to the Dharma protectors, nor fear of the dragon deities.

We entertain the corporal pleasures without a single shame.

All these transgressions are immeasurable and unlimited, [which are] generated from the eye faculty.

We would have been banished to the hell realms, passed through countless kalpas, only then be able to be reborn.

Even if we are able to be reborn, we become sightless as retribution.

If not repented and reformed, all these [transgressions] are eliminated with difficulty. [I am] now in front of the Buddhas, repenting all transgressions [that I have committed].

After repenting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the immeasurable Triple Gem of the ten directions.<sup>514</sup>

Thus, when repenting the eye faculty, the King makes mention of expressions of the look, glance, right or wrong view, the blind, encounter, delusive eyes, the tear, attention, and related retribution related to the eye faculty. Regarding the other sense faculties, Trần Thái Tông also writes in a similar manner about the nature of-or activities

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<sup>514</sup> *Essays*: 58a-b.

involving-each sense faculty, and they are illustrated in detail with an explanation of how they create or involve offenses or transgressions.

This style of writing is repeated in the “making vows” step in which the identified sense faculty is referred to in each vow of every sentence. This format makes it somehow forced or strained. Yet it highlights the importance of repenting the sense faculties or the physical body. In terms of a literary work, the *Procedure* is not a masterpiece due to this lack of flow. But it is highly recommended as a repentance ritual. A repentance ritual must have a time frame, procedure, purpose and meaning, and the *Procedure* clearly fulfills these requirements. Therefore, the consistency of the six time periods of practice and the consistency of expressing the transgressions of the six sense faculties help to strengthen the sincerity, earnestness, and penitential intentions of the practitioners.

(ii) *Imploring the Buddhas*

Next, the penitents would call on compassion and loving kindness of the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and noble ones of the three time periods and of the ten directions to bear witness to all sentient beings in their journeys to liberation (*nirvāṇa*).

(iii) *Sympathetic Rejoicing*

This is the fifth vow among the ten vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, which is an important concept of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In these verses, Trần Thái Tông wrote that sympathetic rejoicing is the cultivation of all Buddhas. After repenting causes of transgressions, the penitents should generate the wish to abide in the awakened mind and practice the ten stages of the Bodhisattva’s path.

(iv) *Dedication of Merits*

Transferring of merits is the tenth vow of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. Buddhists believe that merits are produced after one cultivates wholesome deeds, and the sharing of merit is also a practice of generosity. After repenting, imploring the Buddhas to remain alive to teach the Dharma, and sympathetic rejoicing in the merits of others (merits of repenting in repentance scriptures), penitents would transfer these merits to all sentient beings with a wholesome wish that all would attain Buddhahood.

(v) *Making vows*

In this part, the penitents would bring to mind the goal of attaining the perfection of a certain sense faculty which otherwise creates obstacles on their path to ultimate awakening. This includes twelve vows in which each vow relates to different features and reactions of each sense faculty. For instance, Trần Thái Tông made the twelve vows related to the eye faculty as follows:

First, I vow to grasp the true understanding [the right view].  
 Second, I vow to wipe away the dusts covering my eyes.  
 Third, I vow to see form without attachment.  
 Fourth, I vow to see form without surprise [lit. opening my eyeballs].  
 Fifth, I vow to promptly realize my confused mind.  
 Sixth, I vow to achieve the true wisdom eye.  
 Seventh, I vow to quickly realize the illusion of this life.  
 Eighth, I vow to forever regain the original mind's illumination.  
 Ninth, I vow to eliminate illusion by keen observation.  
 Tenth, I vow to dissolve flower-like images that are born from the eyes.  
 Eleventh, I vow to see the hindrance clouds move far away.  
 Twelfth, I vow to purify the eye karma in a blink.<sup>515</sup>

If we read this part together with the repentance part of each sense faculty, we see that they have a cause-and-effect relationship. In other words, the repentance part presents the causes of transgressions that are made by a sense faculty while the vow

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<sup>515</sup> *Essays*: 59a-60b.



making part presents a means to transform that sense faculty so that a penitent would improve on their path of cultivation.

To sum up, the structure and components of the *Procedure* are consistent and applicable throughout six time periods of a day and night. The text is concise and straightforward, emphasizing how the six sense faculties produce transgressions and how to transform those senses. Additionally, the *Procedure* has a certain literary value due to its style. Many parts are in verse except the incense praise and initiation sections in each repentance performance. However, they are also in parallel constructions, which are easy to remember and recite. This is a typical form of the classical writings of Vietnam. The language used in parallel constructions is poetic; using this style of writing in a repentance text inclines a penitent toward a more earnest and intentional recitation.

## **V. Vietnamese Repentance Scriptures: Ritual Comparisons**

Repentance of the six sense faculties is a general concept in many Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures and is a theme not only limited to repentance rituals. This section offers further discussion of the form of repentance by comparing the *Procedure* and the other two repentance scriptures that have been relevant in Vietnamese Buddhism, namely the LHBS and TBTS. The reasons for choosing these two scriptures is because both sūtras include the concept of the repentance of six sense faculties. In addition, they have also been circulating among Vietnamese Buddhist communities both in Vietnam and abroad. They are considered to be the most popular repentance scriptures of present-day Vietnamese Buddhism.

The LHBS and TBTS were composed in China during the sixth and the eighth centuries respectively. They have been known by Vietnamese Buddhists since the

introduction of the Chinese Tripiṭaka in the eleventh century. There is no material evidence for the practice of these two texts in medieval Vietnam. On the contrary, they only became influential in Vietnamese communities after their translation during the 1960s. The LHBS was first translated into Vietnamese by Thích Viên Giác in 1960, then by Thích Trí Quang (n.d). The TBTS was translated by Thích Huyền Dung in 1968 and by Thích Trí Quang (n.d). It is highly probable that these two texts were much more influential after their translations into modern Vietnamese language because not many monastics could read the classical Chinese at that time. The fact that these scriptures were translated into modern Vietnamese language affirms that the Vietnamese Buddhists were aware of the relevance of repentance performance and practices even before the 1960s. The LHBS is often chanted during the annual rain retreat or recited randomly several times a year depending on the abbots or abbesses and temple practices. In some cases, it is suggested that this text be recited consistently every morning during the years of postulant training.

Among the Vietnamese Buddhists, the TBTS is more influential than the LHBS. Many Buddhist temples would choose it to chant and prostrate for the bimonthly repentance ritual. The TBTS is divided into three sessions and recited three days before the Uposatha ceremonies. The text is occasionally recited by monastics and lay devotees on behalf of the deceased before chanting the *Kṣiṭigarbha Sūtra* 地藏菩薩本願經<sup>516</sup> with the belief that the power of repentance will purify one's body, mind, and karma. As a result, one would have a greater chance to achieve Awakening, to be born into the Land

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<sup>516</sup> *Dizang pusa benyuan jing* 地藏菩薩本願經, T. no. 412, vol. 13.

of Bliss, or a better rebirth in the future. These two repentant texts are also recommended by senior monks and nuns to the novices before their ordinations as Bhikṣus or Bhikṣuṇīs.

Compared to the *Procedure*, both LHBS and TBTS are not daily based scriptures and are much longer than the *Procedure*. From a general perspective, the historical contexts of each of the repentant scriptures are different. While the LHBS and TBTS use stories of Empress Xi (Queen of Liang Wudi 梁武帝) and Wuda 悟達, the *Procedure* started as the personal practice of King Trần Thái Tông himself. The LHBS and TBTS were composed by groups of Buddhist monks and practitioners and have had a long history of development, meaning that their contents, structures, and even their audiences have changed over time. Such a long history of development raises the question about the origins of these scriptures. For example, the LHBS was compiled at the request of Liang Wudi 梁武帝 (r. 502-549) on behalf of Empress Xi, but her name was not mentioned in the content of the scripture at all. Empress Xi's rebirth in heaven-a positive result, as described in the Preface- would also confirm the effectiveness of practicing the LHBS. Similarly, the drama of Wuda in the TBTS was written by someone at later time so that the author would emphasize the efficiency of the repentance method.<sup>517</sup> Indeed, both scriptures have served wider audiences in the form of repentance retreats than a daily-based repentance ritual like the *Procedure*.

After its composition, the *Procedure* was possibly used by monastics or individual lay devotees in Buddhist temples of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect during the Trần dynasty or later periods. Those possibilities are still open, yet I would rather it be treated as a literary work and a personal practice of King Trần Thái Tông. In terms of textual

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<sup>517</sup> Hong, *Compassionate Water Repentance Ritual*, 17.

transformation, the *Procedure* underwent transformation recently, starting with the Thích Thanh Từ's reform movement in the late twentieth century. Nevertheless, its transformation is not very impressive. Thích Thanh Từ compressed the six sections of repentance of the six sense faculties from the *Procedure* of Trần Thái Tông into a one-time performance of the ritual for services on bi-monthly Uposatha days. This became an alternative to the *Hồng Danh Bửu sám* that has been used by some other Buddhist institutions. The transformation has changed the form of its practice. The *Procedure* of the Neo-Trúc Lâm Thiền school is no longer a daily-based repentance anymore. It has evolved from a personal practice to a general procedure for all practitioners in a larger setting.<sup>518</sup>

Regarding the literary sources of their compositions, the three rituals took many Buddhist scriptures and Vinaya texts as references. They include the *āgamas*, *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, *Saddharmapuṇḍarikā Sūtra*, *Mahāparinivārṇa Sūtra*, and so forth.<sup>519</sup> Although Trần Thái Tông did not give a list of fixed references of the *Procedure*, he acknowledged that he consulted many Buddhist scriptures, rituals, Vinaya texts and treatises to compose the *Procedure*. The King probably had contacted with both LHBS and TBTS while composing the text. Historically, the TBTS became one of the most popular repentance rituals during the thirteenth century when it was included in the Chinese Buddhist Canon.<sup>520</sup> This was close to the time when the *Procedure* was

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<sup>518</sup> I provide the *Repentance Ritual of the Six Sense Faculties* composed by Thích Thanh Từ in the Appendix B of this dissertation.

<sup>519</sup> Bai offered a list of scriptures referenced in the TBTS. See Bai Jinxian 白金銑, *Ci bei shui chan fa yuan jiu* 慈悲水懺法研究, 121-126. He also notes that the LHBS shares many similarities with the TBTS in terms of style and structure. This means that the reference sources of the LHBS shares some similarities with the TBTS as well.

<sup>520</sup> Bai, 72.

composed. Compared with the LHBS, the *Procedure* shares many similarities, presenting offences being committed by the six sense faculties as well as the vows for purifying the six senses.

With respect to the components of the repentance rituals, both LHBS and TBTS emphasize the idea that all sorts of wholesome and unwholesome karmas are created through the six sense faculties when they are in contact with six kinds of external objects and manifested through one's thoughts, speech, and actions. Such an idea is repeated throughout the scriptures, and this is the major focus of the *Procedure* as well. Additionally, they include sections of repentance of the six sense faculties. The LHBS provides a sub-section for making vows for each sense faculty in section 39 of fascicle 10,<sup>521</sup> while the TBTS has a separate sub-title of repentance of the six sense faculties<sup>522</sup>

### 1. Comparison of the *Procedure* to the LHBS

Although the LHBS does not have a separate section of repentance of the six sense faculties, the idea does appear throughout the scripture, especially in section 39 of fascicle 10. At the beginning of this section, the authors defined the six sense faculties as sources of either offences or merits.<sup>523</sup> Therefore, repenting or purifying, as well as giving rise to vows of the six sense faculties to be transformed into sources of merits, are important practices in the LHBS.

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<sup>521</sup> The English translation of section 39 of the LHBS is in Buddhist Text Translation Society, *Repentance Ritual of the Emperor Liang: A Complete Translation of Repentance Dharma of Kindness and Compassion in the Bodhimanda*, 312. For the Vietnamese translation, see Thích, *Kinh Lương Hoàng Sám*, 512.

<sup>522</sup> For the English translation, see Hong, *Compassionate Water Repentance Ritual*, 69. The Vietnamese translation is found in Thích, *Kinh Thủy Sám*, 179.

<sup>523</sup> T. no. 1909, vol. 45, p.0963c12-16.

This logic is also the main emphasis of the *Procedure*. At the beginning of each section of repentance, the *Procedure* suggests that the penitents should contemplate that mistaking the six sense faculties causes one to lose the original mind, not knowing the right path, or fall into the three realms of suffering leading to all kinds of transgressions, which have piled up life upon life. Since the six sense faculties are sources of all transgressions, repentance should start there.

In detail, section 39 of the LHBS generally deals with the vow making of the six senses. Here the authors considered both how the six sense faculties are prone to transgressions or offences that cause suffering as well as the vows of transforming them in order to be free from the four forms of rebirth, the three realms or the six paths. The hope is that the penitents would be led to liberation by the practice of upholding precepts, giving, patience, vigor, and other good qualities. Hence, the structure of this section could be virtually divided into six divisions in accordance with the six sense faculties. In each division, there are two sub-divisions, including the transgressions committed by each sense faculty and the transformations through making vows. These contents are comparable to the repentance and vow making sections of the *Procedure*. Beside these two parts, penitents are instructed to prostrate to Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas, starting with Maitreya Buddha, after making vows for each sense faculty. Prostration appears less of a concern in the *Procedure* as the text rather demonstrates the contemplations of the six senses.

Reading this section and the *Procedure* closely, we could find many similarities among expressions, metaphors, and ideas. They present a duality of mundane and supramundane dharma such as on the one side-greed, deception, temptation, doubt, lack

of faith, arrogance, disrespect, harming living beings through the six senses, and-on the other side-the original mind, right view, right perception, and the Dharma body of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the ten directions. Both the LHBS and the *Procedure* have certified that if we recognize the offences, transgressions, and flaws that we have made-i.e., the mundane-we shall confess and repent, and thus we could return to our original nature which is pure, genuine, and perfect-i.e., the supramundane.

Such similarities are results of a developing process of Mahāyāna repentance texts and scriptures in which many of them have shared references. Both the LHBS and the *Procedure* specifically indicate the *Great Collection Sūtra* or the *Mahā-saṃnipāta Sūtra* (大方等大集經 *Đại Phương Đẳng Đại Tập Kinh*)<sup>524</sup> as a key scriptural reference. No doubt, the list of shared scriptural references of both texts go beyond the *Great Collection Sūtra* and there are additional commonalities and overlaps between them. In other words, the *Procedure* has absorbed general themes of Mahāyāna repentance scriptures in the same ways as the LHBS and the TBTS. In all three texts, the physical body is considered as a subject of three karmic sources-thought, speech, and action-from which the ten wholesome or unwholesome karmas would be created. Thus, the physical body or six sense faculties is the source or root of both offence and reformation.

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<sup>524</sup> T. no. 397, vol. 13. The sūtra includes of 60 fascicles translated by an Indian monk named Dharmakṣema (385-433) in the Northern Liang Dynasty. In Vietnamese texts and writings, it is referred as *Kinh Đại Tập* or *Đại Tập Kinh*, an abbreviation of *Đại Phương Đẳng Đại Tập Kinh*. The sūtra mainly discusses the six pāramitās of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the *śūnyatā* nature of Dharma. In addition, it also includes *dhāraṇī*, teachings of Esoteric Buddhism and methods of supporting the Buddha-Dharma of devas.

## 2. Comparison of the *Procedure* to the TBTS

Repentance of the six sense faculties is the last section of the second fascicle of TBTS.<sup>525</sup> It discusses offenses or transgressions that are committed by the six sense faculties. By presenting those possible transgressions, the penitents are directed to pay homage to the Triple Gem of the ten directions and perform repentance of their six senses with a wholehearted mind. Next, the penitents are directed to make vows to transform their six sense faculties. They are quite brief because the TBTS discusses many other aspects of repentance activities such as mental defilements, ten unwholesome karmas, retributions of being reborn in the evil realms, and so forth. Repentance of the six sense faculties is considered as part of repenting unwholesome karmas committed by the physical body.

In the *Procedure*, the repentance of the six senses and vow making sections are more extensive and detailed. However, the style and language in both sections are similar in both texts. The repentance section provides explanations for how the six sense faculties would cause offenses, why their nature is impure, while the vow making section promises transformative results of the six sense faculties on the supramundane level. For example, in describing offences committed by the eye faculty as well as the vows made upon repenting them, the TBTS reads:

From the beginningless time until today, our eyes have been obscured and seduced by baubles and adornments of all colors such as black, yellow, red, green, and purple. Our unwholesome thoughts have arisen upon seeing men's and women's appearances, tall or short, dark or light, their charm or grace...

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<sup>525</sup> T. no. 1910, vol. 45, p.0975a11-b05. De Hong offered the first English translation of the TBTS in 2011. See Hong, *Compassionate Water Repentance Ritual*, 69-71.



Through the merit produced from repenting the faculty of sight, our eyes will be able to see through the pure dharma body of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions.<sup>526</sup>

The *Procedure* gives more details in both sections. Trần Thái Tông also used figures of rhetoric and hyperbole. His method produced two opposite parallels based on the logic of duality. For instance, he would present dualities of an illusory flower and original mind, of love and hate, of good and bad appearances, of delusion and right view, etc., all within three sentences. Similarly, in the vow making of the eye faculty, the *Procedure* gives a list of twelve transformations centering on the nature of sight, such as right view, unattached view, or the original clear sight that is free from illusion and hindrances. Such expressions are as similar as “see through the dharma body of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions.” Thus, compared to TBTS, the repentance of six sense faculties in the *Procedure* has a higher literary value, as it gives more examples and details of the senses and their transformations.

## VI. Analytical Remarks

The *Procedure* appeared as a literary piece and personal repentance practice of King Trần Thái Tông. Within the framework of the *Essays*, it presents one of the three pillars of the King’s cultivations, which include repentance, Thiền, and Pure Land practices. In support of the contemplation of the six sense faculties or the physical body, Trần Thái Tông also wrote essays about the four mountains-i.e., the four periods of birth, old age, sickness, and death-as well as essays on the five precepts, and a universal teaching of the physical body. These related essays offer another way to describe possible transgressions that would be committed by the six sense faculties. Thus, the *Procedure*,

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<sup>526</sup> Hong, 69-70.

as a ritual manual serving in a solemn space and a specific time frame, could not demonstrate all these extra aspects related to the physical body and repentance of the six sense faculties. To the King, upholding the five precepts and protecting and transforming the six sense faculties would lead one to liberation.

As a later composition, the *Procedure* inherits general Mahāyāna concepts that had been common to numerous Mahāyāna scriptures regardless of genre or sect. These either revolve around the ten wholesome or unwholesome dharmas, the three karmic sources of thought, speech, and action; or the Buddhist precepts, the ideas of the six realms and four forms of rebirth, the hells and *nirvāṇa*. Due to its treatment of these concepts, the *Procedure* has shared many similarities with other Vietnamese repentance scriptures such as the LHBS and the TBTS, regardless of their settings.

With the call for revival of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect and the popularity of the Trúc Lâm Thiền school led by Thích Thanh Từ, the *Procedure* has transformed into a bi-monthly repentance manual. Thích Thanh Từ's monastic institutions and some other influential Buddhist monasteries in Vietnam have utilized the *Repentance Ritual of the Six Sense Faculties* since the late twentieth century. Serving as a bi-monthly repentance manual, the *Repentance Ritual of the Six Sense Faculties* does not carry the daily-based intention of the original *Procedure*. Because of these transformations, the *Procedure* remains as a reference for the *Repentance Ritual of the Six Sense Faculties* or a merely personal practice of those who interested in the old text.

## Chapter Seven:

### Conclusion

Modern English-language media and scholarship of Buddhism in East Asia and Southeast Asia have for decades neglected the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. A similar attitude has also existed with respect to the study of confession and repentance rituals in the wider spectrum of Buddhist studies. This dissertation is an attempt to remedy this situation by observing the repentance practice of Vietnamese Buddhism through the lens of the *Procedure*, a repentance ritual composed by King Trần Thái Tông. The study attempts to highlight the syncretic character of Vietnamese Buddhism in the longer historical process by which cultural and religious identity of Vietnam has been defined.

This quest for a cultural and religious identity in medieval Vietnam stemmed from a sense of nationalism, an effort to *de-Sinicize* Vietnamese Buddhism, which had borne Chinese domination for a millennium. Nonetheless, in the historical course of understanding their cultural and religious identity, Vietnamese Buddhists absorbed Chinese influences both consciously and unconsciously. This paradox reflects a separation of political and cultural threats from China in the mind of the Vietnamese. In the religious dimension, the Vietnamese were not consciously disentangling themselves from the Chinese culture in the way that was evident in the postcolonial reactiveness in Vietnamese scholarship during the twentieth century. I am inclined to think that China was historically a political threat to the Vietnamese, but not a cultural or religious threat. Therefore, the will of religious orthodoxy, the claim of the Thiền tradition as the mainstream of Vietnamese Buddhism, the formation of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect in the

thirteenth century were outcomes of the intention to present the independence and maturity of Vietnamese Buddhism as parallel with its Chinese counterpart.

The term “syncretism” used throughout this dissertation does not refer to the process by which elements of distinct religions merge into a unitary worldview leading to a formation of a new religion; instead, it refers to the sense of pluralism, mutual influence, and compromise between different religions or within Buddhism. In the case of Unity of the Three Teachings, I called it a form of “traditional” syncretism, a term I borrowed from Edward T. Ch’ien, which identifies with the self-conscious harmonization of the three religions in hierarchical order. This was the symbiotic relationship in the so-called Unity of Three Teachings in early and medieval Vietnam. The observation of Thich Nhat Hanh in the *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire* elaborates on this traditional syncretism and is quite convincing. He wrote:

A Vietnamese who professes to be a Confucian does not deny his belief in Buddhism, nor must a convinced Buddhist declare that he disbelieves Confucianism. That is why we cannot say with accuracy how many Vietnamese are Buddhist. When we examine the beliefs of a typical peasant, we find elements of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism intimately mixed together, along with still other elements belonging to native beliefs that existed before the three great religions were introduced into Vietnam.<sup>527</sup>

This sense of pluralism is still true in the syncretic process of different Vietnamese Buddhist traditions, schools, and sects.

The understanding of Buddhist sectarianism in Vietnamese Buddhism is quite distinctive, while the composite and syncretic character is universal in Vietnamese religions. Thus, there has been no such clear boundary between different traditions, schools, or sects in Vietnamese Buddhism. References to Buddhist sects in this study should be understood in a loose sense, as an informal pedagogical convention. The idea

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<sup>527</sup> Thich, *Vietnam*, 12.

of a “sect” in Vietnamese Buddhism generates from the practice of identifying a monastic in terms of who ordained him/her, or who had been his/her teacher. This has more to do with the personal master-disciple relationship than a system of monkhood that was organized according to a specific doctrinal outlook. The fact that Vietnamese Buddhists have claimed themselves as adherents to certain Thiền sects only shows that they had contacted with or learned the teachings and practices of certain masters belonging to these sects or schools.

Vietnamese Buddhism was historically interpreted as or identified with Thiền Buddhism. Extant literary sources suggest Vietnamese Thiền Buddhism was ideologically inclined toward the Chinese Southern Chan, which emphasized the idea of sudden enlightenment, the practice of transmission of the mind-seal, the goal of realizing Buddha nature, the negation of all forms of dualistic thinking, and so forth. However, due to the syncretic character, elements of Pure Land and Tantrism have mingled into the Thiền tradition in the construction of the identity of Vietnamese Buddhism. In other words, other schools of Buddhism have existed in practice, but they are always of secondary importance in the mind of Vietnamese Buddhists because they have lacked a sense of lineage transmission that supposedly guarantees the continuity and legitimacy of Vietnamese Buddhism.

Such an interpretation of the Thiền tradition is in line with the syncretic character of Vietnamese Buddhism. This explains the mixing of the practices of eminent monks of the Vinītaruci, the Vô Ngôn Thông, and the Thảo Đường Thiền sects, as recorded in the *Thiền Uyển*. These three Thiền sects had links with both Indian and Chinese Buddhism. The Trúc Lâm Thiền sect may have been held in special regard when it was formed by a

Vietnamese ruler who recognized the unification of existing Thiền sects; its content was also composite and syncretic, with both Chinese and Vietnamese Buddhist elements. The Buddhist ideology of Trần Thái Tông was harmonious in this syncretic context. As a figure of Mount Yên Tử's tradition, the King's *Essays* laid the foundation for the philosophical formation of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect begun by his grandson, King Trần Nhân Tông. In a larger context, the establishment of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect in the Trần dynasty determined the authority and legitimacy of Vietnamese Buddhism. This would be considered as the offshoot of the identity of medieval Vietnamese Buddhism.

Looking the *Procedure* in the framework of the *Essays*, the text was a part of the King's composite understanding of Buddhism. The confession and repentance were performed together with other practices including reciting the name of Amitābha Buddha, contemplating the Thiền kōans, sitting meditation, and learning the Buddhist scriptures. To Trần Thái Tông, the repentance performance and purification of transgressions would save one from falling to the three evil realms of reincarnation and would lead one to liberation. This daily practice was a continuous contemplation of the six sense faculties so that it would prevent unwholesome karmas produced by unskillful thoughts, words, and deeds. In the genre of repentance scriptures, the *Procedure* is a daily-based repentance ritual focusing mainly on the transformation of the six faculties of the physical body. His other repentance composition, the *Equal Ritual*, was filled with the characters of non-duality or the ultimate truth of Southern Chan Buddhism. Examining the repentance practices at both phenomenal (the *Procedure*) and noumenal levels (the *Equal Ritual*) has proven that performing repentance practice was essential in Trần Thái Tông's ideology of Buddhism.

The *Procedure* was the earliest extant repentance ritual among the Vietnamese repentance scriptures. In addition, it could also be considered a literary work as its author tried to modify many parts into verse and used numerous literary allusions from Chinese literature. The daily ritual was succinct yet earnest for its poetic tendency. Based on the translation and analysis of the *Procedure*, this study has tried to link the ritual with other texts in the same genre as well as with the LHBS and the TBTS, two popular repentance scriptures in contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism.

In terms of its structure, the *Procedure* appears to be a liturgical ritual for chanting purposes that was more applicable for daily use, in comparison with the fragments of *Dunhuang* texts of the same genre. This study finds that the components of the *Procedure* resemble those of the LHBS and the TBTS. They dwell on the transformation from impurity to purity, and describe the differences of mundane and supermundane dharmas, the transgressions and elimination of transgressions, the urge to reform, the submission of the repentant in front of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. They all agree that all sorts of karmic retributions are created through the six sense faculties when they come into contact with six types of external objects and are thus manifested through one's thoughts, speech, and actions. The notable dissimilarity of between the *Procedure* and the LHBS and the TBTS is their intended audience. While the *Procedure* is intended for personal performance or for a small group of practitioners, the LHBS and the TBTS are meant for a larger assembly. This feature of the *Procedure* has inspired an effort to transform the text in modern Vietnamese Buddhism so that the ritual would become more accessible to a larger Buddhist community.

At present, the Neo-Trúc Lâm Thiền sect of Thích Thanh Từ has transformed the ritual and used it for bi-monthly repentance ritual in their monasteries, rather than using the *Hồng Danh Bửu Sám*, which is used by other Vietnamese Buddhist temples in Vietnam and abroad. This is an effort to preserve the text in a new religious context, transforming it from a personal practice to a manual for general use in the Buddhist community. By doing so, the *Procedure* has been widely circulated and has caught attention of both academics and practitioners. However, it is possible to argue that the transformation, to some extent, has downgraded the literary value of the text.

Confession and repentance have remained important practices of Buddhism regardless of school or tradition. I am inclined to think that the repentance ritual and performance appeared as early as Buddhist communities existed in Jiaozhou (early Vietnam). This tradition of practice continued throughout the history since the Vietnamese Buddhist community has grown with respect to both size and variety of teachings. The translation and study of the *Procedure* contributes to the scholarship of Vietnamese Buddhism by providing an introduction to repentance scriptures in the field and tradition. This would change the mindset that repentance is not worth studying or that its discussion is limited to the lectures of Buddhist monastics. There is a wide range of options for future research questions that need to be examined, such as (1) how did repentance rituals emerge into religious life of Vietnamese Buddhists? (2) why is the practice of performing repentance rituals essential and beyond Buddhist schools and traditions in Vietnam? (3) what are the commonalities and differences in the way monastics and the laity have approached repentance rituals and practice?



The *Essays* of Trần Thái Tông is one of the important sources to understand the ideology of Vietnamese Buddhism. Therefore, a complete translation of the *Essays* into English language is a compulsory task if Vietnamese scholarship hopes to connect with other Buddhist traditions of East Asian and Southeast Asian countries. That would be an extension of this study which could provide a whole picture of Trần Thái Tông's understanding of Buddhism, and layered elements of the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect of the Trần dynasty. Among the compositions of the *Essays*, the *Recorded Sayings between the Master and his Disciples* and *Verses on Remembrance and Recitation* present the practice of kōan introspection in Vietnamese Buddhism. This form of practice has influenced from the Chinese Chan Patriarch tradition. In the late twentieth century, a group of Vietnamese Buddhists in the South, under the leadership of Thích Duy Lực, tried to propagate this tradition in Vietnam and in the West. Although Thích Duy Lực was not as popular as Thích Thanh Từ with respect to the effort of reviving meditation traditions of Vietnamese Buddhism, the tradition of Thích Duy Lực was also built on the idea of determining the authority and legitimacy of Vietnamese Buddhism by comparing it to the Chinese Chan Buddhism. One may consider this movement to investigate the continuity of the practice of kōan introspection in modern forms of Vietnamese Buddhism.

Some difficulties one may have encountered when conducting studies of Vietnamese Buddhism include the scarcity of Buddhist texts prior to the Trần dynasty, the challenge in connecting religious events and phenomena from historical records and folk tales, and more importantly, the construction of a paradigm of religious thinking to interpret actual forms of Vietnamese Buddhism. This dissertation interprets pluralism or the syncretic character as the backbone of the development of Buddhism in Vietnam

regardless of schools or traditions. The tolerance of religious pluralism has challenged scholars to identify the authority and orthodoxy of Vietnamese Buddhism and how this tradition has connected to the Buddhist worldviews of East Asia and Southeast Asia. To conclude, I would say that it is this syncretic character that makes Vietnamese Buddhism unique and distinguishable.

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## Appendix A

### The Comparative Structure of the Three Editions

	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
SNi's Origin ID	AB. 268	A. 1531, A. 1426, AB. 367/ VHv. 1482	A. 2013
NLV's Origin ID	R. 2004	R. 1200	R. 37
	3 fascicles	3 fascicles	2 fascicles
Edition's year of woodblock print	1631	1840	1867, 1883/1943
Title	<i>The Essays on Emptiness of Thiền Buddhism</i> (禪宗課 虛錄 <i>Thiền Tông Khoá Hư Lục</i> )	- <i>A Collection of Essays on Emptiness</i> (課虛集 <i>Khoá Hư Tập</i> ) - <i>The Sutra of Essays on Emptiness</i> (課虛經 <i>Khoá Hư Kinh</i> ) - <i>The Essays on Emptiness in National Language</i> ( <i>Khoá Hư Quốc Âm</i> 課虛國音)	- <i>A Collection of the Essays on Emptiness Complied by Emperor Trần Thái Tông</i> (太宗皇 帝御製課虛集 <i>Thái Tông Hoàng Đế Ngự Chế Khoá Hư Tập</i> ) - <i>The Essays on Emptiness Complied by Trần Thái Tông</i> 陳太宗 御製課虛 <i>Trần Thái Tông Ngự Chế Khoá Hư</i>
Subtitle	<i>The Caodong Thiền Lineage</i> (曹洞禪宗 <i>Tào Động Thiền Tông</i> )		
Preface	Huệ Duyên	Nguyễn Thận Hiên (Nguyễn Đăng Giai)	Nguyễn Thận Hiên (Nguyễn Đăng Giai)
Commentator in Nôm interpretation	Tuệ Tĩnh	Phúc Điền	

	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
Fascicle One			
			Preface to the <i>Essays on Emptiness</i> (御製課虛序 引 Ngự chế khoá hư tự dẫn)
	Chants on the First Mountain (第一偈 山喻 Đệ nhất kệ sơn dụ)	Chants on the Four Mountains 四山偈 Tứ sơn kệ	A Universal Lecture on the Four Mountains (普 說四山 Phổ thuyết tứ sơn)
	Chants on the Second Mountain (第二偈山喻 Đệ nhị kệ sơn dụ)	The First Mountain (一山 Nhất sơn)	The First Mountain (一 山 Nhất sơn)
	Chants on the Third Mountain (第三偈 山喻 Đệ tam kệ sơn dụ)	Chants on the First Mountain (一山偈 Nhất sơn kệ)	Chants on the First Mountain (一山偈 Nhất sơn kệ)
	Chants on the Fourth Mountain (第 四偈山喻 Đệ tứ kệ sơn dụ)	The Second Mountain (二山 Nhị sơn)	The Second Mountain (二山 Nhị sơn)
	A Universal Lecture on the Form-Body (普說色身 Phổ thuyết sắc thân)	Chants on the Second Mountain (二山偈 Nhị sơn kệ)	Chants on the Second Mountain (二山偈 Nhị sơn kệ)
	A Universal Lecture on Encouragement for the Arising of the Bodhi-Mind (普 說發菩提心 Phổ thuyết phát bồ đề tâm)	The Third Mountain (三山 Tam sơn)	The Third Mountain (三 山 Tam sơn)
		Chants on the Third Mountain (三山偈 Tam sơn kệ)	Chants on the Third Mountain (三山偈 Tam sơn kệ)
		The Fourth Mountain (四山 Tứ sơn)	The Fourth Mountain (四 山 Tứ sơn)

	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
		Chants on the Fourth Mountain (四山偈 Tứ son kệ)	Chants on the Fourth Mountain (四山偈 Tứ son kệ)
		A Universal Lecture on the Form-Body (普 說色身 Phổ thuyết sắc thân)	A Universal Lecture of the Form-Body (普說色 身 Phổ thuyết sắc thân)
		A Universal Lecture on Encouragement for the Arising of the Bodhi-Mind (普說發 菩提心 Phổ thuyết phát bồ đề tâm)	An Essay on the Encouragement for the Arising of the Bodhi- Mind (普勸發菩提心 Phổ khuyến phát bồ đề tâm)
			Essay on the Precept of [Non-] Killing (戒殺生 文 Giới sát sinh văn)
			Essay on the Precept of [Non-] Stealing (戒偷盜 Giới trộm cắp)
			Essay on the Precept of [Non-] Committing Adultery (戒色文 Giới sắc văn)
			Essay on the Precept of [Non-] Lying (戒妄語文 Giới vọng ngữ văn)
			Essay on the Precept of [Non-] Taking the Intoxicants (戒酒文 Giới tửu văn)
			Treatise on Precepts, Contemplation, and Wisdom (戒定慧論 Giới định tuệ luận)
			Treatise on Ordination (受戒論 Thụ giới luận)
			Treatise on the Recitation the Buddha's Name (念 佛論 Niệm Phật luận)



	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
			Treatise on Examples of the Wisdom Teaching (慧教鑑論 Tuệ giáo giám luận)
			Preface to the Guide to Thiền Buddhism (禪宗指 南序 Thiền tông chỉ nam tự)
			Preface to the Vajrasamādhī Sūtra (金 剛三昧經序 Kim Cang Tam Muội Kinh Tự)
			Preface to the Procedure (六時懺悔科儀序 Lục Thời Sám Hối Khoa Nghị Tự)
			Preface to the Equal Ritual of the Repentance Texts (平等禮懺文序 Bình Đẳng Lễ Sám Văn Tự)
			Universal Lecture on the Advanced [Transcendent] Path (普 說向上一路 Phổ Thuyết Hướng Thượng Nhất Lộ)
			The Recorded Sayings between the Master and his Disciples (語錄問答 門下 Ngữ Lục Vấn Đáp Môn Hạ)
			Verses on Remembrance and Recitation (拈頌偈 Niêm Tụng Kệ)

	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
Fascicle Two			
	Admonition Verses at the Time of Tiger (寅時警策偈 Dân thời cảnh sách kệ)	Admonition Verses at the Time of Tiger (寅 時警策偈 Dân thời cảnh sách kệ)	Admonition to the Saṅgha Verses at the Time of Tiger (寅時警策 衆偈 Dân thời cảnh sách chúng kệ)
	The <i>Procedure</i> (六 時分禮識 Lục Thời Phản Lễ Sám)	The <i>Procedure</i> (六時 禮識 Lục Thời Lễ Sám)	Homage to the Triple Gems (禮三寶 Lễ Tam Bảo)
	The Morning Incense Praise (初日 祝香 Sơ nhật chúc hương)	The Morning Incense Praise (初日祝香 Sơ nhật chúc hương)	The Morning Incense Praise (日初祝香 Nhật sơ chúc hương)
	The Incense Offering Verses (獻 香偈 Hiến hương kệ)	The Incense Offering Verses (獻香偈 Hiến hương kệ)	The Incense Offering Verses (獻香偈 Hiến hương kệ)
	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)
	Writing of Initiation (啟白文 Khải bạch văn)	Initiation (啟白 Khải bạch)	Initiation (啟白 Khải bạch)
	Repentance for the Eye Faculty (懺悔眼 根 Sám hối nhãn căn)	Repentance for the Eye Faculty (懺悔眼 根 Sám hối nhãn căn)	Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Eye Faculty (懺悔 眼根罪 Sám hối nhãn căn tội)
	Exhorting for the Eye Faculty (勸請眼 根 Khuyển thỉnh nhãn căn)	Exhorting for the Eye Faculty (勸請眼根 Khuyển thỉnh nhãn căn)	Wholehearted Exhorting (志心勸請 Chí tâm khuyển thỉnh)
	Rejoicing for the Eye Faculty (隨喜眼 根 Tuỳ hỷ nhãn căn)	Rejoicing for the Eye Faculty (隨喜眼根 Tuỳ hỷ nhãn căn)	Wholehearted Rejoicing (志心隨喜 Chí tâm tuy hỷ)
	Merit Transferring for the Eye Faculty (迴向眼根 Hồi hướng nhãn căn)	Merit Transferring for the Eye Faculty (迴向 眼根 Hồi hướng nhãn căn)	Wholehearted Merit Transferring (志心迴向 Chí tâm hồi hướng)

	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
	Vow Making for the Eye Faculty (發願眼 根 Phát nguyện nhãn căn)	Vow Making for the Eye Faculty (發願眼 根 Phát nguyện nhãn căn)	Wholehearted Vow Making (志心發願 Chí tâm phát nguyện)
	The Morning Impermanence Verses (初日無常偈 Sơ nhật vô thường kệ)	The Morning Impermanence Verses (日初無常偈 Nhật sơ vô thường kệ)	The Morning Impermanence Verses (初日無常偈 Sơ nhật vô thường kệ)
	The Midday Incense Praise Verses (中願 祝香偈 Trung nguyên chúc hương kệ)	The Midday Incense Praise (日中祝香 Nhật trung chúc hương)	The Midday Incense Praise (中日祝香 Trung nhật chúc hương)
	The Incense Offering Verses (獻 香偈 Hiến hương kệ)	The Incense Offering Verses (獻香偈 Hiến hương kệ)	The Incense Offering Verses (獻香偈 Hiến hương kệ)
	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)
	Writing of Initiation (啟白文 Khải bạch văn)	Initiation (啟白 Khải bạch)	Initiation (啟白 Khải bạch)
	Repentance for the Ear Faculty (懺悔耳 根 Sám hối nhĩ căn)	Repentance for the Ear Faculty (懺悔耳 根 Sám hối nhĩ căn)	Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Ear Faculty (懺悔 耳根罪 Sám hối nhĩ căn tội)
	Exhorting for the Ear Faculty (勸請耳 根 Khuyển thỉnh nhĩ căn)	Exhorting for the Ear Faculty (勸請耳根 Khuyển thỉnh nhĩ căn)	Wholehearted Exhorting (志心勸請 Chí tâm khuyển thỉnh)
	Rejoicing for the Ear Faculty (隨喜耳 根 Tuỳ hỷ nhĩ căn)	Rejoicing for the Ear Faculty (隨喜耳根 Tuỳ hỷ nhĩ căn)	Wholehearted Rejoicing (志心隨喜 Chí tâm tùy hỷ)
	Merit Transferring for the Ear Faculty (迴向耳根 Hồi hướng nhĩ căn)	Merit Transferring for the Ear Faculty (迴向 耳根 Hồi hướng nhĩ căn)	Wholehearted Merit Transferring (志心迴向 Chí tâm hồi hướng)

	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
	Vow Making for the Ear Faculty (發願耳 根 Phát nguyện nhĩ căn)	Vow Making for the Ear Faculty (發願耳 根 Phát nguyện nhĩ căn)	Wholehearted Vow Making (志心發願 Chí tâm phát nguyện)
	The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)	The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)	The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此 時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)
	The Sundown Incense Praise (日沒 祝香 Nhật một chúc hương)	The Sundown Incense Praise (日沒祝香 Nhật một chúc hương)	The Sundown Incense Praise (日沒祝香 Nhật một chúc hương)
	The Incense Offering Verses (獻 香偈 Hiến hương kệ)	The Incense Offering Verses (獻香偈 Hiến hương kệ)	The Incense Offering Verses (獻香偈 Hiến hương kệ)
	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)
	Writing of Initiation (啟白文 Khải bạch văn)	Writing of Initiation (啟白文 Khải bạch văn)	Initiation (啟白 Khải bạch)
	Repentance for the Nose Faculty (懺悔 鼻根 Sám hối tỷ căn)	Repentance for the Nose Faculty (懺悔鼻 根 Sám hối tỷ căn)	Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Nose Faculty (懺 悔鼻根罪 Sám hối tỷ căn tội)
	Exhorting for the Nose Faculty (勸請 鼻根 Khuyển thỉnh tỷ căn)	Exhorting for the Nose Faculty (勸請鼻 根 Khuyển thỉnh tỷ căn)	Wholehearted Exhorting (志心勸請 Chí tâm khuyển thỉnh)
	Rejoicing for the Nose Faculty (隨喜 鼻根 Tuỳ hỷ tỷ căn)	Rejoicing for the Nose Faculty (隨喜鼻根 Tuỳ hỷ tỷ căn)	Wholehearted Rejoicing (志心隨喜 Chí tâm tùy hỷ)
	Merit Transferring for the Nose Faculty (迴向鼻根 Hồi hướng tỷ căn)	Merit Transferring for the Nose Faculty (迴 向鼻根 Hồi hướng tỷ căn)	Wholehearted Merit Transferring (志心迴向 Chí tâm hồi hướng)

	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
	Vow Making for the Nose Faculty (發願 鼻根 Phát nguyện tỷ căn)	Vow Making for the Nose Faculty (發願鼻 根 Phát nguyện tỷ căn)	Wholehearted Vow Making (志心發願 Chí tâm phát nguyện)
	The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)	The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)	The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此 時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)
			The Evening Admonition to the Saṅgha Verses (黃 昏勸衆偈 Hoàng hôn khuyến chúng kệ)
			The Eight Kinds of Suffering Verses (八苦 偈 Bát khổ kệ)
			The Early Evening Incense Praise (初夜祝 香 Sơ dạ chúc hương)
			The Incense Offering Verses (獻香偈 Hiến hương kệ)
			The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)
			Initiation (啟白 Khải bạch)
			Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Tongue Faculty (懺悔舌根罪 Sám hối thiệt căn tội)
			Wholehearted Exhorting (志心勸請 Chí tâm khuyến thỉnh)
			Wholehearted Rejoicing (志心隨喜 Chí tâm tùy hỷ)
			Wholehearted Merit Transferring (志心廻向 Chí tâm hồi hướng)

	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
			Wholehearted Vow Making (志心發願 Chí tâm phát nguyện)
			The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此 時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)
			The Midnight Incense Praise (半夜祝香 Bán dạ chúc hương)
			The Incense Offering Verses (獻香偈 Hiến hương kệ)
			The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)
			Initiation (啟白 Khải bạch)
			Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Body Faculty (懺 悔身根罪 Sám hối thân căn tội)
			Wholehearted Exhorting (志心勸請 Chí tâm khuyến thỉnh)
			Wholehearted Rejoicing (志心隨喜 Chí tâm tùy hỷ)
			Wholehearted Merit Transferring (志心廻向 Chí tâm hồi hướng)
			Wholehearted Vow Making (志心發願 Chí tâm phát nguyện)
			The Impermanence Verses of This Time (此 時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)

	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
			The Later Night/Dawn Incense Praise (後夜祝 香 Hậu dạ chúc hương)
			The Incense Offering Verses (獻香偈 Hiến hương kệ)
			The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)
			Initiation (啟白 Khải bach)
			Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Mind Faculty (懺 悔意根罪 Sám hối ý căn tội)
			Wholehearted Exhorting (志心勸請 Chí tâm khuyến thỉnh)
			Wholehearted Rejoicing (志心隨喜 Chí tâm tùy hỷ)
			Wholehearted Merit Transferring (志心迴向 Chí tâm hồi hướng)
			Wholehearted Vow Making (志心發願 Chí tâm phát nguyện)
			The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此 時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)
			Admonition to the Saṅgha of Emperor Trần Thái Tông (太宗皇帝勸 衆偈 Thái Tông Hoàng Đế khuyến chúng kệ)

	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
			Afterword (跋後 Bạt hậu) of Tuệ Hiền
			Afterword of the Reprinted Version (重刊 後引 Trùng san hậu dẫn)
Fascicle Three			
	The Evening Admonition to the Saṅgha Verses (黃 昏勸請偈 Hoàng hôn khuyến thỉnh kệ)	The Evening Admonition to the Saṅgha Verses (黃 昏勸衆偈 Hoàng hôn khuyến chúng kệ)	
	The Eight Kinds of Suffering Verses (八 苦偈相 Bát khổ tướng kệ)	The Eight Kinds of Suffering Verses (八 苦偈 Bát khổ kệ)	
	The Early Evening Incense Praise (初夜 祝香 Sơ dạ chúc hương)	The Early Evening Incense Praise (初夜 祝香 Sơ dạ chúc hương)	
	The Incense Offering Verses (獻 香偈 Hiến hương kệ)	The Incense Offering Verses (獻香偈 Hiến hương kệ)	
	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)	
	Writing of Initiation (啟白文 Khải bạch văn)	Initiation (啟白 Khải bạch)	
	Repentance for the Tongue Faculty (懺 悔舌根 Sám hối thiệt căn)	Repentance for the Tongue Faculty (懺 悔舌根 Sám hối thiệt căn)	
	Exhorting for the Tongue Faculty (勸 請舌根 Khuyến thỉnh thiệt căn)	Exhorting for the Tongue Faculty (勸 請舌根 Khuyến thỉnh thiệt căn)	



	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
	Rejoicing for the Tongue Faculty (隨 喜舌根 Tuỳ hỷ thiệt căn)	Rejoicing for the Tongue Faculty (隨喜 舌根 Tuỳ hỷ thiệt căn)	
	Merit Transferring for the Tongue Faculty (廻向舌根 Hồi hướng thiệt căn)	Merit Transferring for the Tongue Faculty (廻向舌根 Hồi hướng thiệt căn)	
	Vow Making for the Tongue Faculty (發 願舌根 Phát nguyện thiệt căn)	Vow Making for the Tongue Faculty (發願 舌根 Phát nguyện thiệt căn)	
	The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)	The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)	
	The Midnight Incense Praise (中夜 祝香 Trung dạ chúc hương)	The Midnight Incense Praise (半夜祝香 Bán dạ chúc hương)	
	The Incense Offering Verses (獻 香偈 Hiến hương kệ)	The Incense Offering Verses (獻香偈 Hiến hương kệ)	
	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)	
	Writing of Initiation (啟白文 Khải bạch văn)	Initiation (啟白 Khải bạch)	
	Repentance for the Body Faculty (懺悔 身根 Sám hối thân căn)	Repentance for the Body Faculty (懺悔身 根 Sám hối thân căn)	
	Exhorting for the Body Faculty (勸請 身根 Khuyển thỉnh thân căn)	Exhorting for the Body Faculty (勸請身 根 Khuyển thỉnh thân căn)	

	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
	Rejoicing for the Body Faculty (隨喜 身根 Tuỳ hỷ thân căn)	Rejoicing for the Body Faculty (隨喜身 根 Tuỳ hỷ thân căn)	
	Merit Transferring for the Body Faculty (迴向身根 Hồi hướng thân căn)	Merit Transferring for the Body Faculty (迴 向身根 Hồi hướng thân căn)	
	Vow Making for the Body Faculty (發願 身根 Phát nguyện thân căn)	Vow Making for the Body Faculty (發願身 根 Phát nguyện thân căn)	
	The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)	The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)	
	The Later Night/ Dawn Incense Praise (後夜祝香 Hậu dạ chúc hương)	The Later Night/ Dawn Incense Praise (後夜祝香 Hậu dạ chúc hương)	
	The Incense Offering Verses (獻 香偈 Hiến hương kệ)	The Incense Offering Verses (獻香偈 Hiến hương kệ)	
	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)	The Flower Offering Verses (獻花偈 Hiến hoa kệ)	
	Writing of Initiation (啟白文 Khải bạch văn)	Initiation (啟白 Khải bạch)	
	Repentance for the Mind Faculty (懺悔 意根 Sám hối ý căn)	Repentance for the Mind Faculty (懺悔意 根 Sám hối ý căn)	
	Exhorting for the Mind Faculty (勸請 意根 Khuyến thỉnh ý căn)	Exhorting for the Mind Faculty (勸請意 根 Khuyến thỉnh ý căn)	
	Rejoicing for the Mind Faculty (隨喜 意根 Tuỳ hỷ ý căn)	Rejoicing for the Mind Faculty (隨喜意 根 Tuỳ hỷ ý căn)	

	<i>Edition 1</i> (Huệ Duyên)	<i>Edition 2</i> (Phúc Điền)	<i>Edition 3</i> (Tuệ Hiền/Việt Nam Phật Điền Tùng San)
	Merit Transferring for the Mind Faculty (廻向意根 Hồi hướng ý căn)	Merit Transferring for the Mind Faculty (廻 向意根 Hồi hướng ý căn)	
	Vow Making for the Mind Faculty (發願 意根 Phát nguyện ý căn)	Vow Making for the Mind Faculty (發願意 根 Phát nguyện ý căn)	
	The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)	The Impermanence Verses for This Time (此時無常偈 Thử thời vô thường kệ)	
	Admonition to the Saṅgha Verses (警 策勸衆偈 Cảnh sách khuyến chúng kệ)	Admonition to the Saṅgha Verses (警策 勸衆偈 Cảnh sách khuyến chúng kệ)	
	Writing of Afterword (跋後文 Bạt hậu văn) (Anonymous)		

## Appendix B

### Repentance Ritual of the Six Sense Faculties<sup>528</sup>

(The Neo-Trúc Lâm Thiền school)

*(Light the incense, kneel, palms joined and chant)*

#### Incense Offering

The agarwood scent from the meditative forest pervades.

The sandalwood from the discernment garden is cultivated by ages.

The moral knife sharpens [the incense] like the topmost mountain peak.

Burning incense, I wholeheartedly make the offering.

#### Praising the Buddha

To the great kind and compassionate ones who save sentient beings,

the ones of great joyous giving who save conscious beings,

the one adorned with the light of hallmarks and fine characteristics,

all assemblies bow and take refuge in with utmost sincerity.

- With wholehearted mind, we pay homage to all the Buddhas of the three time periods to the end of empty space of all Dharma realms. (*I bow*)
- With wholehearted mind, we pay homage to the venerable Dharma of the three time periods to the end of empty space of all Dharma realms. (*I bow*)
- With wholehearted mind, we pay homage to the Sangha of all sages and worthy ones of the three time periods to the end of empty space of all Dharma realms. (*I bow*)

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<sup>528</sup> The Vietnamese version is composed by Thích Thanh Từ, based on the *Procedure* of Trần Thái Tông. Translation is mine, unless otherwise note.

### **Praising the Dharma**

The Dharma is unsurpassable, profound, and wonderful,  
which is hard to encounter and obtain in hundreds of millions of kalpas.

We now have the chance to see, study, and practice it.

We vow to realize its true meaning.

Homage to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the Prajñāpāramitā Assembly. (*3 times*)

### **Heart Sutra<sup>529</sup>**

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, while contemplating deeply the prajnaparamita,  
realized the five aggregates are empty and was liberated from all suffering and hardship.

Sariputra, form is not different from emptiness, emptiness is not different from form. Form is emptiness. Emptiness is form. The same is true of feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Sariputra, all phenomena are empty. They do not arise or cease, are not defiled or pure, do not increase or decrease. Thus, in emptiness, there are no forms, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, or consciousness.

No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no form, sound, smell, taste, touch or dharmas; no eye consciousness so on unto mind consciousness; no ignorance and extinction of ignorance; even unto no aging and death and no extinction of aging and death; no suffering, cause of suffering, cessation, or path; no wisdom and no attainment. As there is no attainment, bodhisattvas who rely on the prajnaparamita have neither worry nor obstruction.

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<sup>529</sup> The English translation of the *Heart Sūtra* is made by Fo Guang Shan Translation Center, *The Heart Sutra*, 2016. <https://fgsinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Heart-Sutra.pdf>.

Without worry and obstruction, there is no fear. Away from confusion and delusion, they will ultimately reach nirvana. All the Buddhas of the past, present, and future rely on the prajnaparamita to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

Thus, know that the prajnaparamita is the great profound mantra, is the illuminating mantra, is the most supreme of all mantras, is the unequalled mantra, able to eliminate all suffering, is true and not false. Thus, proclaim the “Prajnaparamita Mantra,” proclaim the mantra that says:

Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha. (*3 times*)

### **Repentance of the Six Sense Faculties**

*(Kneel and chant)*

With a one-pointed mind, I now repent:

I am (my name), from indefinite and immeasurable kalpas until now, having lost the original mind, not knowing the right path, having fallen into the three realms of suffering by mistaking the six sense faculties.

If [I do] not repent previous transgressions, it will be difficult to prevent future ones.

#### ***Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Eye Faculty.***

The eye faculty karmas are:

Regard for evil causes that have ripened, [we] look down on [doing] wholesome deeds, paying attention to the illusory flower by mistake, and neglecting the original moon.

Love and hate arise, good and bad appearances fight against each other.

Delusion is produced in a glance; the right view is blindingly dazzling.  
 White comes, blue goes; purple is right, yellow is wrong.  
 Looking at everything iniquitously, it is not different from the blind.  
 Encountering beautiful persons, stare at them without a blink.  
 Confusing the past lives, [we] forget about our own original face.  
 Seeing others' wealth and properties, stare with the largely open eyes.  
 Encountering the poor, [we] turn a blind eye on their miserable life.  
 Seeing the stranger's death, shed no drop of tear.  
 Passing away of the relatives, [we] break our own heart.  
 Seeing the Triple Gem, entering the Buddhist temple,  
 facing the Buddha images and scriptures, [we] take no notice.  
 In the Buddha's Hall or in the Sangha's residence,  
 men and women: date, exchange loves, and express sensual desires.  
 We show no respect to the Dharma protectors, nor fear of the dragon deities.  
 We entertain the corporal pleasures without a single shame.  
 All these transgressions are immeasurable and unlimited, [which are] generated  
 from the eye's faculty.  
 We would have been banished to the hell realms, passed through countless kalpas,  
 only then be able to be reborn.  
 Even if we are able to be reborn, we become sightless as retribution.  
 If not repented and reformed, all these [transgressions] are eliminated with  
 difficulty. [I am] now in front of the Buddhas, repent all transgressions [that I  
 have committed].

After repenting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the immeasurable Triple Gem of the ten directions.

***Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Ear Faculty***

The ear faculty karmas are:

Hating to hear the right Dharma but enjoying hearing wicked words.

Confusing the original truth yet following the external absurdity.

Hearing loud music, regarding it as the “Song of the Dragon.”

Listening to the chanting sound, considering it as the frog’s noise.

Paying close attention to the Ba’s songs and the Zheng’s melody,  
but not being mindful to the Tang’s praise and the Buddhist scriptures.

Getting a piece of a flattering compliment, then being happy as wishes.

Being advised with worthy words, not wanting to accept.

Gathering with a few drinking friends and several lewd fellows,  
gossiping here and there, and together we eavesdrop.

When encountering good friends and teachers with valuable words,  
we have turned a deaf ear and reject them.

Hearing the stimulating sound, arouse licentious feeling.

[However, while] listening to a little bit of the scripture, [we] become deaf (as a horse’s ear).

All these transgressions are immeasurable and unlimited, like incalculable dust and sand.

After passing away, we could have fallen into the three evil realms again.



When the suffering ends and [we are able to] be reborn, we still have retribution of being born deaf.

If not repented and reformed, how would all these transgressions be eliminated?

Now, in front of the Buddhas, I repent all transgressions [that I have committed].

After repenting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

***Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Nose Faculty***

The nose faculty karmas are:

Craving for different smells ceaselessly, enjoying hundreds of dense aromas blended.

Not liking the true fragrance of the five kinds of purified scent,  
we keep looking for the floating fragrance of orchids and the scattering musk,  
[yet we have] never cared for the fragrance [from the practices] of *sīla* and *samādhi*.

[When] burning the sandalwood incense to offer in front of the Buddha's statue,  
we extend our heads out to steal the fragrance by basking in the smoke to get its scent.

In accordance with such a habitual knowledge, we disrespect the dragon deities.

We have been enjoying and never wearying of common smells.

Refusing to let go of rosy cheeks and the corner of the eye.

Even though the awakened tree and flowery heart are in front of us, we still turn our back on them.

When going to markets or entering kitchens, we are longing for unwholesome foods, and foraging for foul scraps.

Neither do we abhor reeking smells nor abstain from pungent herbs,

Give ourselves up to them, [we are] just like pigs that plunge deep into the cesspit.

Either we blow nasal mucus, spit yellow sputa,

daub the pillars, smear the stairs, dirty the clean places,

or intoxicated, sleeping in the Buddha's Hall or Sangha's residence.

Our flowing breath from two nostrils contaminate *sūtras* and [Buddha] images.

Stealing the lotus's scent; taking a whiff of that aroma [and] lustfulness arises.

We have not realized nor been aware of all that is due to the nose's karma.

All these transgressions are immeasurable and boundless.

At the time of approaching death, we would have suffered in the three evil realms.

Only then can we possibly be reborn after countless kalpas have passed.

However, when returning to [the human realm], as retribution, we have an obstructed nose.

If not repented and reformed, how could these [transgressions] be eliminated?

[I] now in front of the Buddha, repent all the transgressions [that I have committed].

After repenting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

***Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Tongue Faculty***

The tongue faculty karmas are:

Craving for all kinds of taste, relishing the discrimination between refined and coarse [tastes].

When sampling all the foods, implicitly knowing the fat and lean.

Harming lives of animals to support our own family,  
we fry or roast the poultry, boil or cook the cattle.

[Even if with the foods having] a foul smell, we really eat voraciously,  
[and let] the smell of green onion and garlic suffuse our intestines.

After eating, we again look for [unwholesome] foods, but never feel fulfilled enough.

While coming to a vegetarian fast, or when worshipping Buddhas and praying for deities, we endure our starvation in vain and wait until the ceremony is over.

When fasting in the morning, [we] consume less rice and more water,  
just being like sick persons, [we] try to finish porridge like taking medicine.

Whenever meaty and delicious foods fill our eyes, we chat and laugh happily,  
we get others drunk on wine or invite them to eat, preferring the warm [foods] and refusing to eat the cold ones.

When inviting guests and treating friends, or marrying off sons and daughters,  
we kill and harm sentient beings; thus, all [these actions] are because of the three inches.

[We] tell lies and slander others, or make up entire stories,  
overflowing with double-tongued talks and rising harsh speeches.

[We] scold and curse the Triple Gem; antagonize parents,  
cheat the virtuous and deceive the noble ones.

[We] defame the monarch and accuse our fathers falsely,  
or talk about others' articles of slander while covering up our mistakes.

[We] discuss then and now, praise and blame this and that [matter],  
or show off our riches and honors and humiliate the poor.

[We] drive away Buddhist monks and nuns, storm at the servants.

Slandorous talk is like poison, false speech is like metallic reed.

Opulent words have covered our faults, [we] make false speech into a truth.

[We] blame the heat and cold, or spit on our homeland,  
talk nonsense in the Sangha's residence, and brag in the Buddha Hall.

These transgressions are immeasurable and boundless, like dust and sand, which  
is uncountable.

On the day of death, we shall be banished into the hell of plowing tongues.

[While] an iron plough is plowing constantly, [boiled] melted copper pour over  
our tongues continuously.

[When] retribution ends in the hells; we would be reborn after ten thousand kalpas.

Despite being able to reincarnate as human, [we] bear the retribution of being  
dumb.

If not repented and reformed, how can transgressions be eliminated?

Now, in front of Buddhas, I repent all transgressions that I have committed.

After repenting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the  
unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

***Repentance of Transgressions Produced by Body Faculty***

The body faculty karmas come from the father's semen and mother's blood which are a provisional combination of a human body.

The gathering of five vital organs and a hundred bones in harmony assembles [a physical body]. When we attach to that physical body and consider it as our true body, we forget the Dharma body. Since killing, stealing, and debauchery arise [from our physical body], the three karmas follow along.

The killing karma is:

[We] often commit the tyrannical and ruthless actions while not giving rise to [a heart of] compassion and benevolence. [We] slaughter four kinds of sentient beings while not knowing that they share the same nature with us. [We] either harm [other beings] by accident or kill them intentionally, doing it by ourselves or having others to do it. [We] either find sorcerers to get a talisman to put other people under a spell or ask them to make poisons for harming living beings. [We] are not only engaged in harming other people, but also do not feel compassion for animals. [We] either burn down ranges of mountains or dry up sources of streams, either spread or throw a casting net, either catch eagles or hunt dogs. We rejoice over whatever we have seen and heard. When attention arises, mental formation sets in motion, the turning of any motion or action [as mentioned] leads to such [killing] transgressions.

The stealing karma is:

Seeing others' money and valuables, [we] give rise to thoughts of stealing. [We] either break the locks or remove the seals; either pick pockets or take away caskets. When seeing the Sangha's properties, [we] give rise to thoughts of greed. [Then we] take

them as [our] family's possessions while not being afraid of deities' anger. Not only do [the act of stealing] gold and jade make for a serious transgression, but also [by taking] a blade of grass and a needle [without permission], the stealing karma is formed.

The sexual misconduct karma is:

[Our] hearts are infatuated with sound and beauty; [our] eyes attach to beautiful cosmetics regardless of integrity and chastity, generating intimate thoughts of lust. Or in a pure location such as in the Buddha's shrine or Saṅgha's residence, lay men and lay women are teasing and rubbing another's shoulders. They get flowers or throw fruits; kick feet or hold shoulders; drill caves or cross over walls. All these cases form sexual misconduct karma. These transgressions are immeasurable and boundless. At the end, upon approaching our death, [we] must go to the hell where males hold copper pillars and females lie on iron beds. Only after ten thousand kalpas, can we reincarnate, while still suffering with enduring retributions. If not repented and reformed, how can [such transgressions] be eliminated? Now, in front of the Buddha, I repent all transgressions that I have committed.

After repenting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

### ***Repentance of Transgressions Produced by the Mind Faculty***

Transgressions of the mind sense are:

When encountering to conditional objects, vague thoughts arise and carry on without any interruption. When clinging to mundane feelings, we seal our mind with perceptions. It is like when a silkworm makes its cocoon, the more bound and tangled it becomes. Like a moth to the flame, it self-immolates and falls apart. [That is when]

ignorance or non-enlightenment produces delusion or illusion that disturbs and upsets the mind. All these are because of the three poisons.

Offenses of greed: being conspiratorial and jealous; being stingy and ransacking substances. When investing ten in order to gain thousands in profits, [we feel] it is not enough still. Wealth is like a contained river, while our heart remains like a leaking jar. Therefore, no matter how much we get, [our heart] subsequently empties again, so I said, it is never fulfilled. Despite our rotten surplus grains or strings of thousand tainted coins, [we] do not help to the poor. Silks and garments are heaped up together; have you ever given some to others? Gaining hundreds from others, [we] still say that it is not much. All the while losing a coin, [we think] it is spending a lot. [We have] a storehouse full of treasures and jewels or a granary filled with thread and hemp, yet we have never practiced generosity. We measure and contemplate over day and night. Our minds are bothered and full of worry. All this is because of karmic activities of craving.

Offenses of aversion: Its root originates from greed; fire of anger is burning us. Having a glaring look and a stern sound, [we easily] ruin peace and harmony. Not only with the vulgar, but also with the monastics, [we fully] engage in polemical debates regarding scriptures and treatise, and we criticize with each other, [even] defaming teachers and scolding our parents. The grass of tolerance withers; the poisonous flame blazes formidably. [We] hurt animals by making a statement, harm people by uttering a speech. Neither remembering the Buddha's compassion nor observing the forbidden precepts, [we] discuss Thiền like the sages, while facing to external objects like the ignorant. Despite residing in the house of emptiness, [we] have not attained the practice of no-self. It is as though [part of] a tree would make a fire, and then fire starts out to

burn the tree itself. All these preceding transgressions are because of karmic activities of aversion.

Offences of ignorance: The original nature is ignorant; our consciousness is illusory. [We] neither differentiate seniors and juniors nor distinguish between good and evil. Killing a bear, our arms are broken; chopping down a tree, our body is wounded. Insulting Buddhas, [we] incur calamity; spitting into the sky, our faces get wet. Be ungrateful and forgetful of others' kindness, [we] turn our backs to the righteous and benevolent ones. [We] are neither aware of, nor consider things. All these are because of karmic activities of ignorance.

All these transgressions are packed and extremely deep-rooted. As we approach to the ends of our lives, we will fall into the hell realm. Passing through countless kalpas, [we] can reincarnate. Even if reborn, [we] still suffer the retribution of ignorance. If not repented and reformed, how could these transgressions be eliminated? Now, in front of the Buddha, I repent them all.

After repenting, with a wholehearted mind, I take refuge in and bow to the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions.

### **Recite the Triple Gem and Five Precepts**

#### **1. The Triple Gem**

We vow to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha for the rest of our lives. (*Bell, 1 bow*)

- Taking refuge in the Buddha: We worship, venerate, and follow the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha-the Awakened One-and-our Original Master-for the rest of our lives.



- Taking refuge in the Dharma: We worship, venerate, and practice the righteous Dharma that the Buddha taught for the rest of our lives.
- Taking refuge in the Sangha: We venerate and respect all the Buddhist monastics who dedicated themselves to practicing the righteous Dharma as taught by the Tathāgata.
- Once taking refuge in the Buddha, we vow not to take refuge in heavenly gods, semi-gods, demons, or animals.
- Once taking refuge in the Dharma, we vow not to take refuge in the teachings of the heretics.
- Once taking refuge in the Sangha, we vow not to take refuge in wicked friends or extreme religious groups.

*(Bell, 1 bow)*

## **2. The Five Precepts**

- We vow to uphold the precept of non-killing for the rest of our lives. That is, we do not kill whether human beings or animals-large or small-by any means, do not order other people to kill and do not enjoy hearing people practice killing. We vow to protect our lives and those of other beings.
- We vow to uphold the precept of non-stealing for the rest of our lives. That is, when we see other people's property and belongings, we do not give rise to the thought of greed and try to take these objects in sneaky or mischievous ways. We vow to protect other people's property as our own.
- We vow to uphold the precept of not committing adultery for the rest of our lives. That is, we are faithful to our spouses, do not give rise to thoughts of

having sensual misconduct with other people that would cause suffering to our family and the families of others; we often praise the values of a chaste life.

- We vow to uphold the precept of not using false speech for the rest of our lives. That is, we do not tell lies or deceive people out of greed, do not speak harsh words out of aversion in a way that would make others sad or angry, and do not slander or speak maliciously so as to cause another to be prisoned or experienced difficulty. We vow to always speak the truth.
- We vow to uphold the precept of not taking alcohol and intoxicants for the rest of our lives. That is, we do not drink either strong or light alcohols as they tend to cloud the mind and cause illnesses in the physical body. Taking alcohol and intoxicants-including opium and drugs-cause suffering to our family and relatives.

May the Triple Gem protect us and give us energy and dedication in order to uphold the five precepts purely and become good people in this life and in many later lifetimes as well.

### **Homage to the Buddhas and Patriarchs**

With wholehearted mind we bow to: (*1 sentence 1 bow*)

Namo Vipassī Past Buddha.

Namo Original Master Shakyamuni Buddha - Principal Buddha of Sahā world.

Namo Bhaiṣajyaguruvaidūrya Prabha Buddha – Principal Buddha of Eastern Land.

Namo Savior Master Amitābha Buddha – Principal Buddha of Western Land.

Namo Maitreya Future Buddha – Head of Dragon Flower Assembly.

Namo Great Wisdom Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva.

Namo Great Action Samantabhadra Bodhisattva.

Namo Great Compassion Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

Namo Great Power Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva.

Namo Great Vow Kṣitigarbha King Bodhisattva.

Namo Venerable Master Mahākāśyapa.

Namo Venerable Great Wisdom Thera Śāriputra.

Namo Venerable Great Piety Maudgalyayana.

Namo Venerable Vinaya Master Upāli.

Namo Venerable Sūtra Master Ananda.

Namo Bodhidharma Patriarch.

Namo Khương Tăng Hội Patriarch.

Namo Great Ascetic Trúc Lâm Patriarch.

Namo Pháp Loa Patriarch.

Namo Huyền Quang Patriarch.

Namo Successive Generations of Patriarchs Through the Ages Who Were from India and Traveled Eastwards to China and Vietnam.

### **Wholehearted Vow Making**

First, I vow that my original mind is always clear and tranquil.

Second, I vow that my store consciousness stops grasping for external objects.

Third, I vow all doubts and suspicions are entirely shattered.

Fourth, I vow the *samādhi* moon is always perfectly round.

Fifth, I vow all worldly dharmas are free from birth and death.

Sixth, I vow to tear down the net of sensual desires.

Seventh, I vow to contemplate and practice the ten stages [of the Bodhisattva path].

Eighth, I vow to obtain the divine hearing beyond the three realms.

Ninth, I vow that my monkey-like mind ceases to wander.

Tenth, I vow that my horse-like intention stops roaming.

Eleventh, I vow to open my heart to listen to the Buddha-Dharma.

Twelfth, I vow to be devoted to the Thiền teachings of the Patriarchs.

### **Wholehearted Merit Transference<sup>530</sup>**

I revolve my mind to the saintly Saṅgha,  
respectfully prostrate the Compassionate One.

Vowing to attain the ten stages of Bodhisattva's path,  
my true awakening mind will remain in a non-retrogressed stage.

### **Prayers to Conclude the Service**

*(Saṅgha Master prays only)*

The Thiền gate is always solemn and tranquil.

The Saṅgha is always in peace and harmony.

The Buddha's wisdom shines brightly.

The Dharma rain is pouring constantly [in this world].

All Buddhist devotees are always in deep devotion.

The field of merit and blessings is growing.

All sentient beings are living in peace together,

and enjoy the beautiful scenery [every day].

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<sup>530</sup> Thích Thanh Từ combines the two former verses in the "Wholehearted Rejoicing" section and two latter verses of the "Wholehearted Merit Transference" section of the *Procedure*.

Wars are ended everywhere.

May we all soon attain Buddhahood.

Namo Shakyamuni Buddha

*(All stand up and bow)*

Homage and take refuge in the unexcelled Triple Gem of the ten directions. *(3 bows)*