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**PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT IN THE ZEN POETRY OF TRUC LAM YEN TU**

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**ABSTRACT**

Buddhism is not only a religion but also a kind of human wisdom in the impermanent life. Over thousands of years of the nation's history, Buddhism is still one of the religions with great influence on many aspects of social life. Buddhism in the Tran Dynasty unified many schools for the first time into Truc Lam Zen Buddhism and developed into its own independent sect of Vietnamese Buddhism. The philosophical thought of Zen Buddhism was increasingly developed and was not only popular in the court, but also spread widely in the world and had a great impact on society. In this paper, the author analyzes some basic content of philosophical thought in the philosophical thought of Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect, thereby pointing out some values and limitations in this school's philosophical thought.

**Key Words:** Philosophical thought, Zen poetry, Truc Lam Yen Tu, Vietnam.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Referring to the intellectual quintessence of his ancestor during the Tran Dynasty, it is impossible not to mention Zen Buddhism, especially Zen poetry of the Tran Dynasty. This is a lineage that has been adopted from Chinese Buddhism, but has been thoroughly nationalized by the Vietnamese. Zen poetry of the Tran dynasty not only talked about religion as a religion, but also conveyed concepts about the world and human life, carefully selected by the ancients (Doan, 2013). Zen Buddhism philosophy always directs people to be fully aware of their existence; heaven - Nirvana is not located far away, but right in our hearts, right at the moment that we exist. Nowadays, Zen Buddhism in general and Zen poetry in particular have influenced every life of Vietnamese people from philosophy, ethics, literature, art to customs and habits, lifestyle, thinking...From the worldview, humanity view, ethics, aesthetics to the voice of the masses, more or less, it is influenced of Buddhist philosophy and thoughts in Zen poetry of the Tran Dynasty.. Buddhism used to play a role in consolidating the spirit of solidarity of the entire people and fighting for protection of the country (Doan, 2015; Nguyen, 1997). When the country is at peace, culture and the nation have conditions for development, Buddhism also contributes significantly to the quintessence of the nation.

**2. CONTENTS**

**2.1. The worldview of Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect**

*The concept of the universe*

The concept of the universe is an image that represents abstract and supernatural realities in Buddhism. According to the concept of Buddhism, the universe is formed through perception of people; there are mind, there are things. The universe is in the law of formation, staying, destruction, emptiness; and human beings are in the law of birth, stay, change, and die. The origin of the world has no beginning and no end; reincarnation is the same. The image of nature in Tran's

poetry is full of symbolic meanings for Zen philosophy. They interact with nature and the universe with many emotions, richness and diversity, from a calm mood in front of the lonely, remote natural scenery to the gentle pleasures mixed with a little dissatisfaction with the times.

The idea of the ontology of Buddhist philosophy is most clearly expressed through the ideas: impermanent, non-self of existence in space and time. Buddha taught: everything changes incessantly in every satna (every second, every minute, even in the blink of an eye). From humans to the universe, everything operates according to the law: formation, staying, destruction, emptiness (or birth, staying, change, or cessation) which are likened to the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn, winter, or birth, old age, illness, and death. In those four periods, the period of staying is very short, only a satna. It means, all phenomena that exist in reality are not fixed, but are on a constant stream of change which is forever without beginning and end. All formations are impermanent, changeable, damaged, and unsupportable. All the Conditioned Dharma are boring. One must seek liberation in order to escape from this world. It is the impermanence of all that exists. The concept of impermanence is also used by monks to look at the change of the human body.

Life is always in motion in terms of predestined relationships. There is birth and there is death. Reincarnation is in the universe. Things always move according to its laws, and cannot be changed. Literary writers of the Tran dynasty all said that Heaven has a natural law of existence and operation. This law is permanent and immutable, completely unrelated to the will of man. The sequential rhyme order of the four seasons is the natural expression of Heaven: "*Mountains and rivers overlap, the road is far away; Winter passes, spring comes; heaven's way rotates; Everything pass indifferently, according to the changing weather*"(Nguyen, 2000).

In addition, all "natural" things and phenomena are produced by the creation of heaven and earth, such as: mountains, rivers, seas, roads, landscapes. Heaven's natural function is to protect all people and things in the world: "*Heaven and earth protect together, the moon and sun shine together, that's why all things are born, grow and nurture all species*" (Nguyen, 2006). It can be seen that all things in heaven and earth are created by nature, and at the same time, they are also under the influence of nature. This creation and dominion is a natural function of Heaven; from past to present, it is like that, it has no intervention of any personal or divine will. *The essence of the universe is empty when the mind reaches absolute stillness. When the mind is transparent and still, it can integrate into the essence of the universe.*

### ***The concept of providence***

The Chinese concept of providence was passed on and actively absorbed and transformed by our people. Due to the absorption of local cultural characteristics and historical needs, the concept of heaven has more or less expanded in meaning, thus creating a special feature of the concept of heaven in the Tran dynasty. Heaven is the physical space that exists around man, including tangible things and phenomena of the natural world that human senses can observe and perceive. Heaven is understood in many different meanings:

*First of all, Heaven means sky and earth.* Heaven is the physical space that exists around man. It includes all tangible things and phenomena of the natural world that human senses can observe and perceive. Zen masters of the Tran Dynasty were aware that: This "heaven means sky and earth" has an extremely large scope. It is a space that covers all things and phenomena of the natural world. For example, Zen master Duong Khong Lo used "*van lĩ*" (thousand miles) to describe the height of Heaven: "*Miles of green rivers, miles of blue sky*" (Nguyen, 1998). Sky

above man's head combines with the earth's ground beneath man's feet, thus creating a high and wide natural space of heaven and earth. This tangible material space covers all things and phenomena of nature, including the sun, moon, stars, plants, wind and rain, etc. Under the observation of the poets of the Tran Dynasty, sky is extremely high, the land is extremely wide, the rivers and seas are extremely deep, these three things combine to form the living space of all things. Although made of matter, but because the scope of Heaven is extremely large, humans cannot measure the end, plus the extremely wonderful operating laws, so human beings have no way to touch the boundary of Heaven, nor can they understand the everlasting operation of Heaven.

*Besides, Heaven also has the meaning of providence.* This meaning of Heaven is consistent with the meaning of the supreme god, that is God. On the one hand, it is used to refer to the will and orders of Heaven, and on the other hand, it refers to man's destiny arranged by Heaven. When man faced with *providence*, that subject fades, so man becomes incompetent and powerless before providence. Therefore, providence is an objective natural law that governs human life. Human beings need to obey Heaven's command, absolutely cannot rebel against that inevitability, that is, not against Heaven's will. All human's success or failure, life and death, are subject to providence, completely unable to resist and run away from it.

## **2.2. Life view of Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen Sect**

### ***Perspectives on the relationship between man and nature***

Man is a minor celestial, nature is a major celestial. Therefore, man has the characteristics of nature, which govern human development. Humans are in contact with the vast nature, so people need to know the information of nature. The human entity is the product of the yin and yang principle, both opposing and unifying. It contains and transforms each other. When it is fully developed, man not only knows heaven, understands heaven but also unites with Heaven to makes "*One Unity*".

Both the minor and major celestial undergo periodic changes in four regular rotations: Birth, stay, change, death (Formation, Staying, Ruin, Emptiness/Birth, aging, sickness and death). Humans are the micro-universe (the great heaven). Therefore, if wanting to understand the universe (nature), one must understand human beings. Therefore, one of the basic topics of Buddhist thinking is to analyze people (from material structure to psychological and spiritual structure) in order to find a way to liberate people from the laws of Birth, Aging, Sickness, Death to reach Nirvana as (returning to the original nature).

Humans integrate into nature, consider nature and humans as a "*Unity of all things*" (Nguyen, 1993). Humans have not considered themselves as a subject in opposition to nature, but only as an object for contemplation, analysis and interpretation. Therefore, the characteristics of nature in the eyes of medieval people have the integrity, no division and no separation. Therefore, Eastern poetry pays great attention to the image of nature and sees this as an aesthetic object, through describing scenes to express emotions.

### ***The concept of human-to-human relationship***

People in Zen poetry have a unique feature that cannot be confused with other types of poetry because it carries a mysterious nature. Since then, the classification is only relative. In essence, people in Zen poetry include: *the free man, the selfless man, the speechless man, and the fearless man*, which are not separate from each other, but interwoven with each other. The

destruction of wrong views or the spirit of no-self, no words, no fear, etc. The ultimate goal of them is to bring absolute freedom to people, to bring people to reach the human-cosmic level.

Concepts like: *Nirvana or samsara, afflictions or bodhi*, the Twelve Causes and Conditions such as *ignorance, formations, consciousness, contact, feeling, love, holding, possessing, birth, aging and death*, were deeply and specifically explained by Zen masters of the Tran Dynasty. The themes of Buddhism have been generalized and the positive spirit of Zen Buddhism has been promoted. It brings new shapes and new styles. The way of meditation is now not only confined to the space of the temple, but it also extends to exist in many different environments, even on the battlefield to protect the homeland, meditation also appears with the meaning of “*the battlefield is the meditation hall*”.

The issue of birth and death is also the focus of the Tipitaka. With the content that, when a person dies, the karma caused from the six senses organs to synchronize with the six sense objects to form six sense of consciousnesses in life with these consciousnesses still remains, and that is the cause for a stage of otherlife .

In the issue of birth - death, at that time, two opposing relations appeared, one side said that birth - death was a major issue in human life, and the other side said that the concept of birth and death was just common sense. In this viewpoint, it can be understood that sentient beings are deluded and think that birth and death is a major issue; and they always feel anxious, afraid, obsessed about it. According to Buddhism, the human body is just a composite of the four elements and the five aggregates, formed by cause and effect and dependent origination. If *predestined affinity* are combined, they will be born, but if *predestined affinity* are dissolved, they will die (Doan, 1998). On the contrary, mortals often look for the origin of birth and death. That's the attention that everyone cares about in life. As a result, many personal views and theories on this issue are created. That shows a burning dream, the fearlessness of suffering to seek immortality even at any cost, even life. They don't understand that *birth, old age, illness, and death* are laws of nature that can't be changed. Being a human being, there are always two sides in it, birth - death, but the issue of birth - death are two factors that are always placed in a state of confrontation, but are always bound to each other. The body is dead, but the soul is still alive and will never die. The soul is never lost, leading to creating karma and falling into a vicious cycle that cannot have salvation. Since people cry from birth to the time they grow up, they have gradually moved towards the door of death. Therefore, people need to understand that birth and death is a law of nature that cannot be violated. If everyone understands this, they will live a good life and always do more useful things for their homeland and country.

### **2.3. Values and limitations in philosophical thought of Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect *Values in philosophical thought of Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect***

*First*, as long as people always have thoughts that our mind gives birth to Buddha; Buddha comes from the heart; sooner or later, we will reach the peak of the Way. Therefore, the first value in the philosophical thought of Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen school is expressed through *the thought "Buddha is in the heart"* (Buddha nature is in each person). It is typical in the influence of Zen poetry of the Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect that has had a positive impact on the formation of the Buddhist meditation system in general. A comfortable lifestyle, a heart towards good things is what people always want and strive to achieve. That thought led them to a peaceful and happy place right in the heart of the world.

*Second*, Buddha only exists in the world. Outside of the world, there is no Buddha Dharma anywhere, so the philosophical thought of the Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect shows its second value through the thought of *breaking attachment or Buddhism in the world, not separating from the evil world*. Zen practitioners are always reminded *not to do* anything, dividing this world into a land of Buddhism or a hell on earth. That is what will motivate people to go to an illusory world filled with the sweetness of attachment (love, reciprocity and attachment).

*Third*, it can be found right in the daily activities itself, that is, if people want to do good deeds, there is only way to help people, for the good life of people. That is the third value in the philosophical thought of the Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect. It is expressed in the thought of *entering the world or becoming a Buddha (that is, without seeking outside, but using wisdom to see the true nature of one's mind in order to realize enlightenment)*. In Zen poetry of the Tran Dynasty, that thought speaks of *the worldly nature and the national character*, which is clearly and deeply expressed. Those are the two main ideas in the process of existence and development of the country. *Incarnation* is a term formed from Confucianism, with the requirement that people must have a strong will to advance, be aware of their own historical mission and be responsible for society, but the spirit of *incarnation* in Zen poetry of the Truc Lam Yen Tu zen sect, in general, it is about entering life and being active at the same time rather than contributing and devoting one's strength. It is also the incarnation, but the spirit of incarnation in Zen poetry of the Truc Lam Zen masters has a social purpose, serving the society, worrying about the safety of the country and the people. That is the unique feature of the incarnation spirit of Zen poetry of the Tran dynasty, which contributed to the formation of Vietnamese Buddhist thought.

*Fourth*, the voice of the heart expresses the burning desire of people to be liberated from difficulties in this life, which is the fourth value of Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen Sect expressed in terms of human life; Zen poetry of Zen masters we can see. Their ideology also tried to oppose the extremely harsh class distinction regime of the time. At the same time, it also denounces in a society which is full of injustices, thereby requiring freedom for people in terms of awareness as well as equality in society.

From its emergence to this day, Buddhism is the only religion to speak out against theocracy. In its ideas, there are many dialectical materialistic elements. Buddhism also actively opposes the harsh caste system, denounces injustice, demands freedom of thought and social equality, and at the same time, expresses the desire to free people from the tragedies of life. Buddhism also upholds goodwill, equality and charity for everyone as the basic ethical standards of social life.

*Fifth*, the value of Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect, which embodies philosophical thought in Zen poetry of the Tran dynasty, has contributed to educating and perfecting each individual's morality. With the development trend of current society, education is likened to a closed social production process. It requires a lot of effort, care and attention to detail. Because a person is not only influenced by that generation directly, but it also affects many next generations. Therefore, in a relatively stable production technology, it is the teacher and the product created is a person with both virtue and talent. In the context of Vietnam, we are working together to build a new culture imbued with national identity. In particular, the scientific achievements of mankind are increasing day by day, the 4.0 revolution has developed strongly. It creates conditions for the process of integration and expansion of international exchanges to take place easily and quickly. With these favorable conditions, we need to take the opportunity to selectively absorb those cultural quintessence, and at the same time, also absorb the Vietnamese people's profound ideas

about the essence and life of the Vietnamese people from their own lifestyle, soul to personality.

***Limitations in philosophical thought of Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect***

Buddhism developed, so the literature of the Tran Dynasty was also heavily influenced by Buddhist thought. The monks' works were not only for the purpose of teaching religion, but also contained the deep concepts of humanity. In Zen poetry of the Tran dynasty, there was a smooth combination of religion and life. However, there are also some limitations in terms of worldview and human-life view.

*Firstly*, this has made people stay away from life, live peacefully, refuse to strive, falter before all difficulties and dangers of life at that time, so it is extremely dangerous. Since then, Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect also mentioned the concept that *life is suffering*, this life is temporary, it is a stepping-stone for a peaceful life in Nirvana. The condition to get rid of suffering is to cultivate to go to the realm of nothingness and cessation (Nirvana), that is, to go to a place where you are no longer a human being. Here, there is no mention of suffering due to material and spiritual deprivation, due to oppression and exploitation. This suffering is pessimistic, cynical, and inhuman. It is inappropriate and even hinders the progress of society. As a result, some monks today have to say in a different way: *people have suffering but also happiness* and Buddhism prays for people to come to a peaceful place, not to a place where there is nothing left. People living in the real world, must have faith, ideals, know how to overcome all difficulties and situations to master their own lives and then necessarily have an optimistic attitude, always love life, have faith in yourself. This limitation also affects the thoughts of Zen masters in many Zen poems.

*Secondly*, because people easily fall into the net of ignorance, trapped in the bondage of dual views. Therefore, the philosophical thought of the Truc Lam Yen Tu zen sect, holds that *human life is suffering* and all suffering is due to the processes taking place in each person's own, *life, aging, illness, death*, due to the desire to *live in lust*, due to ignorance, falling into cycle of reincarnation. At the same time, the condition to get rid of suffering is to enter the realm of nothingness (Nirvana), that is to go to a place where you are no longer a human being. Or people in the world do not understand that the human body is due to the dissolution of the five aggregates, due to the combination of causes and conditions, all from signlessness, from emptiness (“*Thân tòng vô tướng bản lai không*”, mean that the essence of the word “signlessness” is inherently empty). Therefore, dual view means that seeing the emptiness nature of all things; it is a way of seeing things and phenomena into two completely different extremes to assign it one pole or the other. Pushing people into clinging to signs and clinging to language is a consequence of the dual view. These two attachments are like a dark cloud that obstructs people's perception on the way to their true nature. While clinging to signs only focuses on the appearance of things and phenomena without seeing the true nature of the object, then clinging to language is too attached to words, the concept; thereby leading to not seeing through the hidden reality behind the language.

*Thirdly*, in terms of philosophy, due to its roots in Buddhism, the philosophical thought of the Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect also shows an idealistic stance, so even though the Buddhist teachings contain profound realist ideas, Buddhism has come up with explanations of the mysterious in the human world. Especially, Buddhism has slipped to the metaphysical concept (Nirvana has no movement, no change, ...). From nothing to something, so it is the same. *Afflictions, Bodhi* are the same; *eternal truth*, and *vain hopes* are the same, they don't really exist. Body, karma, mind, nature...are just fake, illusory like the wind blows, clouds drifts. Well, don't run to search, ask what to do with Buddha. When we can't see everything, including movement

and change, it's all just an illusion. The Buddha comes from the heart; the scenery is all fanciful, nothing, so it is not possible to recognize the mind and the Buddha in opposition. When we see the scene in front of us, we understand that it is the world of things, that phenomenon is born from the mind, from the consciousness; but the scenery as well as the mind, consciousness are nothing.

*Fourthly*, Zen poetry of Truc Lam Yen Tu zen sect shows the mystery and illusion. Due to the liberating thought in Buddhist meditation, Zen poetry of the Tran Dynasty has the characteristic, that is, it is an experience of a magical world, but mysteriously it mainly expresses the introspective mood, and at the same time, it has absolute individuality. Therefore, we cannot prove or disprove it, even the conclusion cannot be proved or disproved. Therefore, Zen meditation in the Tran Dynasty shows the intuitive power of the inner mind in specific fields such as ethics, philosophy, religion, etc., thereby, discovering the ability to absorb the needs of inner consciousness. Because of its emotional bias and introspection, Buddhist meditation cannot directly approach high-precision fields such as natural science and modern technology.

Buddhism is a religion, so it inevitably has shortcomings when it sees the world and people. However, with an objective attitude, we need to be aware of the positive elements in the thought of Buddhist philosophy.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In the Tran Dynasty, Zen studies not only brought the breath of life, but moreover, it caught up with life and became the life philosophy of the times with great meaning and action, that is saving the country, saving the people, bringing the people stand up to fight for protection and affirm their sovereignty. Poetry of the Tran Dynasty was deeply influenced by Zen studies with works heavily imprinted with Buddhism. Zen poetry always contains in it profound dialectical thought. It shows most prominently the awareness of the world and people around, that thought discusses the issue of birth - death, existence and loss of human being in the cycle of reincarnation, aging, illness, death, the human concept of reincarnation, destiny and liberation. The world always has impermanent moving and infinite changing. This is the cause of other things. Thereby, it advises people to practice, cultivate and perfect themselves both intellectually and morally. Besides, Zen poetry of the Tran dynasty also contributed to the formation of a system of very unique philosophies for Buddhism in particular, national literature and in the history of Vietnamese thought in general.

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