CHAPTER IV
CRITICAL EVALUATION OF BUDDHISM
UNDER THE TRAN DYNASTY (1225-1403 C.E.)

The events of January 1226 brought to an end the Ly dynasty and Tran Canh ascended the throne. The most remarkable consequence of all this was that now an epoch of trouble and confusion created by the fighting between central and local authorities came to an end. Consequently, centralized and unified powers were now restored. Further, production in various sectors of the economy increased and agricultural growth took place as a result of land clearing and encroachments on the sea. Industry and trade reached new heights of progress. Many handicraft villages appeared and national as well as international trade prospered. Foreign merchant vessels could be now seen coming in increasing numbers in Van Don and other ports. The administrative apparatus also became more efficient from the centre down to the village level. A collection of books called “Thong che” with elaborate statutes, laws, and rites of the state was also finalized.

National spirit that had already developed in Vietnam was further heightened after the victories over the Mongol invaders and had a strong impact on the entire range of literature and arts. Literature in Nom characters also came into being. Myths and folk tales as well as stories about the nation’s founders and defenders began to be collected. An elaborate writing of national history was begun. At the same time, examinations for the selection and appointment of public functionaries became a regular practice. Confucian ideology attained step by step its important position in the spiritual life as well as social milieu. But under Tran’s reign, Buddhism held on to its prosperous position until the middle of the fourteenth century. The kings of the Tran dynasty had clearly understood the role of Confucianism and Buddhism in the society. The king himself became a quintessential example of a ruler who began to run the affairs of the state as well as take his responsibility seriously like the ideal ruler Aśoka. For instance, in his litany “Thien Tong Chi Nam” King Tran Thai Tong wrote: “The means to come over obscurity, the shortened way to understand problems of life and death, were the great teaching of Buddha. To be the model for the posterity, to be
the example for the future, those are heavy responsibilities of the predecessors… Now why can’t I make mine the predecessor’s responsibility, make mine Buddha’s teaching?”

**From Continuance to Unification**

One cannot speak of Buddhism under the Tran reign without paying attention to the Truc Lam Chan sect and the ending of the preceding Chan sects. The promoter of the Truc Lam sect was King Tran Nhan Tong. After having definitively left his family in 1299, the king became “the first founder of Truc Lam sect” i.e. its first ancestor. The second ancestor was the monk Phap Loa and the third was the monk Huyen Quang. However, to say that the sect began with the king does not necessarily mean that the Truc Lam sect did not inherit anything from the predecessor Buddhist sects. Before Tran Nhan Tong left his family, in 70 years of existence of the Tran dynasty, how had Buddhism developed itself? Existing historic documents are not sufficient to show us the answers to all these questions. However, one can have a fairly good idea from the available sources about the origin and growth of the Truc Lam sect despite lack of clarity on certain issues in its various developmental stages.

According to the scheme in the article “Luoc dan Thien phai do” published in the beginning of the book entitled *Truc Lam Tue Trung Thuong Sy Ngu Luc.*¹ Here, one comes across an order of religious transmission from the generations under the Ly dynasty up to the Three Ancestors of Truc Lam sect as follows:

- Thong Thien
- Tuc Lu
- Ung Thuan
- Tieu Dao
- Tuc Trung

¹ Published in 1683, p. 6a.
Truc Lam
Phap Loa
Huyen Quang

That document is quite a credible one\(^2\). The Buddhist generations as Tuc Lu, Ung Thuan, Tieu Dao were related in the *Thien Uyen Tap Anh*. Thong Thien was a lay Buddhist belonging to the thirteenth generation of the Wu Yan Tong sect and was also called Thong Su (died in 1228). He was the disciple of monk Thuong Chieu’s (died in 1203). Tuc Lu was a monk who belonged to the fourteenth generation and was monk Thong Then’s disciple. *Thien Uyen Tap Anh* did not mention Tuc Lu’s day of death, but at least, that monk lived in Tran Thai Tong’s lifetime for the reason that Ung Thuan, after having been a dignitary during that king’s reign, came to have lessons with him.

Ung Thuan was a lay Buddhist, *Thien Uyen Tap Anh* related his history under the name Ung Vuong (but in the story of Tuc Lu he was called Ung Thuan) who belonged to the fifteenth generation of the Wu Yan Tong sect. His name was Do Van Tinh, born in the Hoa Thi quarter (Ve market?), Thang Long. He served King Tran Thai Tong with the title second degree royal official and was afterwards monk Tuc Lu’s disciple in the Thong Thanh pagoda, Chu Minh hamlet, Thien Duc district (Ha Bac). Ung Thuan was the master of many well-known monks during Tran’s reign. According to *Thien Uyen Tap Anh*, his disciples were Tieu Dao, state advisor Nhat Tong, Gioi Minh and Gioi Vien. And according to “Luoc dan Thien phai do,” besides Tieu Dao, his two other disciples were Dao Sy, Quoc Nhat.

The monk Tieu Dao was not mentioned by *Thien Uyen Tap Anh* in a particular paragraph but was only recalled among the followers of monk Ung Thuan.

\(^2\) Certain people alleged that *Luoc dan thien phai do* as written by Tue Nguyen, the editor of *Tue Trung Thuong si ngu luc’s* edition in 1683, therefore it does not deserve credit. That is not true for the following reason: In *Luoc dan thien phai do*, King Ly Thai Tong was called Nguyen Thia Tong (to observe the rule of tabooed names under the Tran dynasty) and King Tran Thanh Tong was called “our Lumperor Thanh Tong” and written in bold strokes. Hence that must be surely a true reproduction of a document written since the Tran dynasty.
Nevertheless, it is obvious that Tieu Dao played an important role in the formation of the ideology of the Truc Lam sect. He was the teacher of both Tue Trung’s and Tran Tung. The latter was a brilliant Buddhist scholar during Tran’s reign to whom we will come back in the following pages. In the article “Thuong sy hanh trang” King Tran Nhan Tong wrote: “At the age nearly twenty, for having beloved Buddhism, Tue Trung attended the lessons given by the monk Tieu Dao in Phuc Duong, and thus understood the meaning.” Tue Trung always showed respect and admiration for Tieu Dao. In the book *Tue Trung Thuong Sy Ngu Luc* we find a certain number of Tue Trung’s poems connected to monk Tieu Dao. The poems including “Inquiring about the great monk Puc Duong’s health,”³ “Dedication to the monk Tieu Dao in Phuc Duong”⁴, “Nature in Phuc Duong”⁵, and “Funeral oration to the master”⁶ written by Tue Trung may have also been meant for Tieu Dao’s funeral oration. According to “Luoc dan thienphai do,” monk Tieu Dao had apart from Tue Trung many other disciples, particularly Ngu Ong, Thu Nhau, Dao Tiem Vi Hue, Thach Dau (who burnt himself after having reached enlightenment), Than Tan, Lan Toan, Thach Lau, Thon Tang. It may be said that Tue Trung was the most brilliant disciple of Tieu Dao. But Trung was a lay Buddhist studying at home while Tieu Dao was cloistered in Phuc Duong in a wild forest. But where was Phuc Duong? At the same time, other documents point out that monk Tieu Dao belonged to the generation which propagated religion in the Yen Tu Mountain.

As can be seen, the origin of Truc Lam sect goes back to the period and activities of Ung Thuan, Tuc Lu, and Thong Thien, who belonged to the last generation of the Wu Yan Tong sect. Thus we can say that the Truc Lam sect was the continuance of the Wu Yan Tong sect. But although Tue Trung was Nhan Tong’s master, he was not but a lay Buddhist studying at home while Nhan Tong after having definitively left his family came to cloister in the Yen Tu Mountain (Dong Trieu district, Quang Ninh province). That is why the Truc Lam sect was also called the Truc Lam Yen Tu sect. But before Nhan Tong’s arrival to that mountain, many monks

³ *Tue Trung thuong ngu luc*, edition 1683, p. 28a.
⁴ Ibid. p. 38a-29a.
⁵ Ibid. p. 29a.
⁶ Ibid. p. 29b-30a.
had successively cloistered there. It is clear that those monks had played an important role in the development of Buddhism during Tran’s reign before the Truc Lam sect was founded, but it is very difficult to accurately identify them. We have now only one list of the various generations which cloistered in the Van Tieu Hoa Yu pagoda situated in the Yen Tu Mountain. That list was rewritten by the chief monk Phuc Dien in *Dai nam thien uyen ke dang luc luc* (also called *Thien Uyen Ke Dang Luc*) published in circa 1858.

According to this list, the successive generations of the monks having cloistered in Yen Tu are as follows:

1. Hien Quang
2. Vien Chung
3. Dai Dang
4. Tieu Dao
5. Hue Tue
6. Dieu Ngu i.e. Tran Nhan Tong
7. Phap Loa
8. Huyen Quang
9. An Tam
10. Tinh Lu Phu Van
11. Vo Truoc
12. Quoc Nhat
13. Vien Minh
14. Dao Hue
15. Vien Ngo
16. Tong Tri
17. Tam Tang Khuc Tham
18. Son Dang
19. Huong Son
20. Tri Dung
21. Tue Quang
22. Chan Tru
23. Vo Phien

The accuracy of the whole of this list is doubtful and the order of the generations seems to be unreliable. Nevertheless the list of the generations before Nhan Tong, as related above, might have some consultative value. Thus to consider

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7 That list was summarily established without mentioning the period in which the monks lived. That is why can think that Phuc Die had related here the successive generations in Yen Tu even after the Tran dynasty. But it is not the case. In one of the pages (p. 7b) prior to the page where appears this list, Phuc Dien also lists a number of high ranked monks under the Tran dynasty, covering several monks included in the above list, together with some other monks. That fact proves that the monks listed in the Yen Tu successive generations according to Phuc Dien were those living under the Tran dynasty. If that is true we would hardly believe that after Huyen Quang i.e. since 1334 until the end of the Tran dynasty, there were so many generations in Yen Tu. We are of the opinion that Phuc Dien had arranged the names of the monks under the Tran dynasty in an arbitrary manner. For Nhat is a disciple of Ung Thuan, same generation with Tieu Dao, while in Phuc Dien’s list, he was put in the twelfth generation. In our opinion, Khue Tham must be Que Tham (may be there was confusion between the two similar characters “Khue” and “Que’), according to Luoc dan thien phai do, this one was Quoc Nhat’s disciple, and yet Phuc Dien put him in the seventeenth generation. Always according to Luoc dan thien phai do. Huong Son is Truc Lam (Nhan Tong)’s disciple, same generation with Phap Loa, was put in nineteenth generation by Phuc Dien, while Phap Loa was in the seventh generation.
monk Hien Quang as the founder of the Yen Tu mountain group proves itself perfectly accurate. This information is mentioned in *Thien Uyen Tap Anh*.

Monk Hien Quang– properly named Le Thuan– was born in Thang Long. He was Thuong Chicu’s disciple and belonged to the twelfth generation of the Wu Yan Tong sect. But according to *Thien Uyen Tap Anh* Hien Quang did not belong to the thirteenth but the fourteenth generation of that sect. Although he was brought up by Thuong Chieu from the age of eleven and educated for as long as ten years, he did not achieve his education on Buddhism when the monk master Thuong Chieu died in 1203. He had to pursue his education with monk Tri Thong. Afterward, he had to come to Nghe An and receive education from the monk Phap Gioi in the Yen Trung mountain. In the end, he returned and cloistered in Yen Tu Mountain where he died in 1220.

*Thien Uyen Tap Anh* informs us that Hien Quang had a disciple named Dao Vien who buried him in a cavern that probably was in the Yen Tu Mountain. According to Phuc Dien’s list, it was Vien Chuong who came after Hien Quong. Thus, it was very probable that Dao Vien and Vien Chuong were one and the same man. According to the preface for the book *Thien Tong Chi Nam* in 1236, King Tran Thai Tong escaped from the capital for the Yen Tu Mountain where he met the state monk Truc Lam. Truc Lam’s state monk might only be in this context Sao Vien or Vien Chuong. The book published afterward as *Thanh Dang Luc, Yen Tu Son Truc Lam Tran Trieu Tong Ban Hanh, Thien Uyen Ke Dang Luc* related that Thai Tong met the state monk Vien Chung when he came to Yen Tu. More than ten years after that meeting, the state monk Truc Lam came to the capital, resided in the Thang Nghiem pagoda and organized the publication of the prayers. When Tran Thai Tong showed his newly written book *Thien Tong Chi Nam*, he proposed to get it carved and printed.

In the list established by Phuc Dien, the Vien Chung’s successor in the Yen Tu Mountain was the monk Dai Dang. About the latter “Luoc dan thien phai do”

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8 *Dai Viet su ky tuan thu* (ban Ky. Vol. 5, p. 9b) related this event one year later, that means in 1237, and the name of the state monks was Phu Van. But according to Phuc Dien’s list of monks. Phu Van was of the tenth generation of Yen Tu.
informed us a little more. According to this book, about the same period with Ung Thuan i.e. under the Tran Thai Tong’s reign, the lay Buddhist Thien Phong belonging to the Lam Te sect on Chuong Tuyen (Fujian, China) came in Vietnam and propagated Buddhism to the state monk Dai Dang and the chief monk Nam Tu. Thus, we can think that the state monk Dai Dang was at the same time the disciple of two people, the state monk Vien Chung in Yen Tu and lay Buddhist Thien Phong. According to Thanh Dang Luc when the latter came to Vietnam, King Tran Thai Tong invited him to lecture on Buddhism in Thang Long. Perhaps, Dai Dang followed those courses in that period. If that was true, the state monk Dai Dang concentrated in himself two traditions, that of Wu Yan Tong in the country and that of Lam Te from China. As we will see, the influence of the ideology of Lam Te sect on Buddhism under Tran’s reign was very manifest.

According to “Luoc dan thien phai do” the state monk Dai Dang preached Buddhism to King Tran Thanh Tong. This fact was confirmed by other books, such as Thanh Dang Luc, Ke Dang Luc. “Luoc dan thien phai do” also recalled, besides Tran Thanh Tong, a certain number of Dai Dang’s followers, such as the state monk Lieu Minh, Thuong Cung and Huyen Sach. This book did not list Tieu Dao in the list of Dai Dang’s disciples but only mentioned him as Ung Thuan’s disciple, the same as Thien Uyen Tap Anh did. Only Phuc Dien mentioned Tieu Dao as Dai Dang’s continuator in the Buddhist missionary work in Yen Tu. If it was so, Tieu Dao would be the converging point of the two branches Ung Thuan (Tang Long) and Hien Quang (Yen Tu) in the Wu Yan Tong sect. Those whose branches originated from the monk Thuong Chieu under the Ly’s rein – a monk belonging to the Wu Yan Tong sect but cloistered in the Luc To pagoda (Dinh Bang, Gia Lam) which was an ancient center of the Viśiṣṭārūḍa sect. After the scheme in “Luoc dan thien phai do” as well as in Thien Uyen Tap Anh, the Ung Thuan branch was the lay Thong Thien’s continuator and Thong Thien or Hien Quang were both monk Thuong Chieu’s disciples.

As has been said above, monk Tieu Dao was surely Tue Trung’s master and the latter was Nhan Tong’s master. But in the list made by the chief monk Phuc Dien as mentioned above, another Tieu Dao’s continuator in Buddhism propagating work in Yen Tu was Hue Tue. We do not know anything about this monk and we also have
no other documents for accurately checking it up. In any case, we know that when Nhan Tong carafe to cloistering in Yen Tu he realized a second converging point of the two branches Yen Tu and Thang Long (if we can call so) of the Wu Yan Tong sect between the end of the Ly’s reign and the beginning of the Tran’s, that sect being split since Thuong Chieu, if it was true that Tieu Dao had realized the first converging point before Nhan Tong. With the foundation of the Truc Lam sect Nham Tong realized the unification of the Buddhist clergy under the Tran’s reign. But that task began only in 1299. That meant that during the thirteenth century, Buddhism developed itself with many sects.

Except the above mentioned Buddhist sects, in “Luoc dan thien phai do” and at the beginning of Tue Trung Thuong Sy Ngu Luc, were related some more sects having existed at the beginning of Tran’s reign. For example, one of them was led by the monk Vuong Chi Nhan who transmitted to the chief monk Nham Tang who in his turn transmitted to the lay Nham Tuc. Another sect led by the chief monk Nhat Thien was transmitted by Lord Chan Dao, a high ranking official of the Trans’ dynasty. Lay Thien Phong’s sect coming from the Song was transmitted to Huyen Sach through Dai Dang and the former transmitted to Phu Trac.

Among the sects having existed under the Ly reign, as we have seen, only the branches from the Wu Yan Tong sect remained. The Thao Duong sect that had developed among the royal and dignitary circles under the Ly reign, perished after the crash of the dynasty. The Vinñäruci sect was also dispersed. As it was seen in the preceding chapter, since the Ly reign, many pagodas of that sect became cloistering places for the monks of the Thao Duong or Wu Yan Tong sect. After monk Y Son’s death (1213), none of his disciples was recalled.

Anyhow, Buddhism development in the thirteenth century differed from that at the end of Ly’s reign. By about the end of the twelfth century, Buddhism clearly showed signs of corruption and degradation. In 1198, the vice Governor Dam Di Mong reported to the King Ly Cao Tong as follows: “At present the number of apprentice monks equals that of service people. By themselves they gather, name inconsiderately their chiefs, for gangs and do many filthy actions. They publicly eat
and drink in religious places or indulge in lewdness in nuns’ rooms. They hide themselves in the daytime, and go out in the night as fox and mice. They corrupt customs and deprave religion, all that becomes progressively a habit. If it is not forbidden, it will grow worse.”

Having listened to Dam Si Mong’s advice Ly Cao Tong ordered a large number of apprentice monks to return to worldly life.

In the thirteenth century, with the foundation of Tran’s dynastic Kingdom, Buddhism attained to new heights. The Tran Kings together with the royal circles went on supporting Buddhism. But this century was a period of scarce construction work as well as protracted but difficult resistance against the Mongol empire. All the national forces were mobilized for the defense and the edification of the country. Even the royal family members and aristocrats had to lead the poor people and the servants to do the land clearing in peace time and to lead soldiers to the battles in wartime. The erudite Buddhist scholars such as Thai Tong, Tue Trung, Tanh Tong, Nhan Tong, whence the country was at peril, became heroic defenders and scored brilliant exploits. It was why that in the thirteenth century Buddhism became purer and entered more into life. We can say that under Tran’s reign, the national spirit gave a new vital force to Buddhism. The thoughts as to be cordial with the people, to consider the people as the root that we will find materialized in Nhan Tong’s or Tran Hung Dao’s speeches had been already expressed in state monk Truc Lam’s advice given to Tran Thai Tong in 1236: “When one is king, he must make his the people’s will, must make his the people’s heart.”

Although it was the continuance of the branches of the Wu Yan Tong sect, the Truc Lam sect was begun and built as a unified clergy, bearing a fully Vietnamese character, getting rid of ancient Buddhist traditions imported from abroad. It is also here that a manifestation of the national conscience developed.

**Tran Thai Tong and the Khoa Hu Luc**

Thai Tong Tran Canh (1218-1277) was enthroned at the age of eight. When he was eighteen, his uncle Tran Thu Do who concentrated all powers in his hands at the time

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10 See The Preface of *Thien Tong Chi nam*, in *Khoa Hu Luc*.  

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compelled the nephew to divorce his wife Chieu Thanh (i.e. Ly Chieu Hoang) and to marry Thuan Thien, the wife of Tran Lieu (Tran Lieu was Tran Canh’s brother). Being extremely agitated and afflicted with distress, he escaped from the citadel for the Yen Tu Mountain where he wanted to cloister. But Thu Do once more compelled him to come back to the throne. This happened in the year 1236. Thereafter, he devoted himself to the study of Buddhism. More than ten years later, he finished writing the book *Thien Tong Chi Nam*. Afterwards, he wrote some more books on Buddhism. The extant *Khoa Hu Luc* contains only a very few of his works. As we know, Tran Thai Tong was the author of the following books on Buddhism:

1. *Thien Tong Chi Nam*
2. *Luc Thoi Sam Hoi Khoa Nghi*
3. *Kim Cuong Tam Muoi Kinh Chu Giai*
4. *Binh Dang Le Sam Van*
5. *Khoa Hu Luc.*

*Thien Tong Chi Nam* was Thai Tong’s earliest work on Buddhism. It was lost and it remains only the preface written for *Khoa Hu Luc*. *Luc Thoi Sam Hoi Khoa Nghi* was a book presenting the repentance rites according to six moments in a day. The whole book including the preface remains complete in *Khoa Hu Luc* collection. *Kim Cuong Tam Vuoi Kinh Chu Giai* (annotations for the sutra Kim Cuong Tam Muoi) was lost except the preface. Through that preface, we know that Thai Tong was very delighted with this collection of prayers so that he “devoted spirit and soul to write the annotations.” *Binh Dang Le Sam Van* was also a book on the repentance rites. It was lost and it remains only the preface being published in *Khoa Hu Luc*.

*Khoa Hu Luc* might be a separate book written by Tran Thai Tong, but the extant *Khoa Hu Luc* is nothing but a collection of articles written by that King in different periods. The different copies of *Khoa Hu Luc* which remain until now comprise or three books (upper-middle-lower) or two books (upper and lower). In the most complete copies, the upper book comprises the following articles: 1. Tu Son, 2.

The lower book (the middle and the lower book in the three-book collection) consists of the litanies and texts on prayer-recitation in the incense and flower festivities, and other rites in accordance with the six moments of a day: morning, midday, after noon, sunset, midnight, and daybreak. It is thus clear that all parts of the Luc Thoi Sam Hoi Khoa Nghi are comprised in the lower book, whereas its preface particularly was written in the upper book. With the help of the books in Khoa Hu Luc still extant, we know something about Tran Thai Tong’s Buddhist ideology. Through his works, that king showed himself a realist educator, tried to lead people to the Buddha worship, as well as a theoretician having deep knowledge on Buddhism.

Tran Thai Tong’s point of view expressed in his dissertation on the Self (Ātman) was also the Nothing (Śūnyata) point of view that denied everything. In the preface of Khoa Hu Luc he wrote: “The four greatnesses are originally nothing. From Nothing, Falsity arises, and from Falsity, the Phenomena appear; the Phenomena appear from nothing. Thus Falsity follows Nothing, Nothing makes Falsity to appear. And from Falsity, the Phenomena appear.” Nothing means no possession, no existence, opposing possession that means existence. Nothing means emptiness, nullity, opposing phenomena, the phenomena that appear before us. Falsity means trouble, error. Thai Tong and other Buddhist scholars under the Tran’s reign cherished the concept of Falsity. That concept was a concomitant of untness which is a nature of the phenomena universe while Falsity was regarded as the cause originating it. Because of Falsity, Nothing becomes the Phenomena or to say accurately, nothing is erroneously perceived as the Phenomena.

Tran Thai Tong very often used the concept on “thinking.” He sometimes spoke about that concept with various meanings as reflection; thinking and separated
in good thinking, evil thinking, honest thinking, and dishonest thinking.\textsuperscript{11} Buddhist “thinking” was also used to show the cause leading to the constitution of the man body. In the article “Pho Thuyet Sac Than” he wrote: “When the man body was not yet incorporated in the fetus, from where would it take form? It’s with the help of praying that converges the affinities that concentrate the five blind nesses.” Praying begins, i.e. conceptions arises and thus converges the affinities i.e. causes and affinities conciliate themselves that means the beginning of the cause-effect relation. Expressing the same idea, in the article “Tu Son,” when speaking about “Life” he wrote: “An error on thinking leads too many causes,\textsuperscript{12} the embryos confided in the parent’s love becomes “a body in mixing the male and female blood.” Thai Tong stressed once again upon that idea in the following litany:

“Nature” is molded in a thousand forms,

Originally, it has no external signs; it also has no internal germs.

It’s only wrong that there is “thinking” and completely to forge “no thinking.”

So it goes against “no life’ and suffers “life.”

“Nature” in this context also shows the concept “character” which Thai Tong often called with several different names: character (tinh), nature (ban tinh), conscience (giac tinh), Buddhist character (phap tinh), true heart (chan tam), own heart (ban tam), true origin (chan nguyen).\textsuperscript{13,14}

In the preface for\textit{ Kim Cuong Tam Muoi Kinh}, Tran Thai Tong described “nature” or “true heart” as follows: “When the nature ends, the true heart dies, there is no more concept on pettiness or lack, if it is not an enlightened man, one cannot find out its genesis. Three is no concentration, no dispersion, no lost, no remaining. The eyes and the ears have neither image, nor sound. Because there is no to be or Not to be, there is nor religious, neither profane; it exists singly, there is no other thing

\textsuperscript{11} See \textit{Niem Phat luan}.
\textsuperscript{12} Chinese in the original: “Huu sai nhat niem, co hien da doan.”
\textsuperscript{13} See \textit{Pho khuyen phat bo de tam}
\textsuperscript{14} See \textit{Pho khuyen phat bo de tam}
except it, so that it is called Kim Cuong nature.” In the preface of Binh Dang Le Sam Van, Thai Tong also wrote: “Buddhist nature, the absolute truth is not involved in the least to the anxiety. The true heart remains quiet because it has got rid of dirty things since long. Because the true heart is hidden, falsity originates, illusory things appear.”

Such a “nature” or a “true heart” is also the “marvelous nature,” “the absolute truth” that the monks under the Ly’s reign had described. Thai Tong also often recalled the familiar principle of Buddhism that was “to see the nature means to become Buddha.” “Anyone who studies the Buddhist religion must only see its nature.”

“For having come back from light, one can see the Buddhist nature and become Buddha.” What deserves to be noted is that Tran Thai Tong as much as the scholars in Buddhism under the Tran’s reign were very active in calling the believers to discover the nature through the devotion to the heart. Despite the approach of that problem by a certain number of monks under the Ly’s reign, it wasn’t generally strongly stressed by the Buddhist scholars of that reign as the Buddhist scholars under the Tran’s reign.

To see the Buddhist nature, Thai Tong advised “to turn inside oneself.” And particularly, he always regarded seeking of one’s own nature as a “return.” He insistently called everybody to realize that return. He deeply grieved that “everybody stepped forwards unconsciously without thinking of returning.” Being passionate for beauty, venturing on the life and death way, man would go farther and farther from his own nature. Thai Tong compared the mean as the wanderers on their wind and dust way in their exile journey:

Always wandering like a man in the life full of vicissitudes,

He gets mile and mile far from his native village.

But if he is determined to return, he is able to get to his native land, even:

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15 Toa Thien luan
16 Pho khuyen phat bo de tam
17 Pho thuyet sac than
18 Ibid.
19 Tu Son, the litany “First Mountain.”
No need to go a long way, one can come home.²⁰

Most of Tran Thai Tong’s works aimed at getting consciousness on that own nature. Perhaps the work of Tran Thai tong which explained on the Buddhist position the most clearly, the most deeply the way of getting enlightenment was the article “Pho Thuyet Huong Thuong Nhat Lo.” The title of that article meant “speaking largely about the way leading to the upper world.” That was the way leading to the enlightenment. It began with a sentence of monk Ban Son’s speech.²¹ “A thousand saints don’t transmit the way that leads upwards. The scholar has to toil hard as the gibbon tries to catch its shadow.”²² It was a different problem: Why neither a Saint nor an ancestor does transmit the way for going upper, for getting enlightenment?

With strongly impressive images, audacious and original ideas, that King Monk expressed his profound thought on that problem. He brought unfeasible the transmitting of the sealed heart from generation to generation of which the men often said. “That be recommended in Linh Son²³, it was nothing but a troublesome place; that be particularly transmitted in Thieu That²⁴, it was nothing but a troubled cavern.” Through those sentences, he wanted to mean that if someone can’t find by himself his own nature but asks for the others’ help, nobody can transmit him the scaled heart. Tran Thanh Tong wrote: “Laozi with a yellow face²⁵ had a glance and turned away. Monk Ho with blue eyes²⁶ knitted his brows and turned aside. Ma to hung his feather duster; Thu Son built a container with bamboo; Trieu Chau tore his cotton habit; Van Mon abandoned his rice cakes. Duc Son threw his walking stick away; Lam Te

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²⁰ Niem Tung ke, text No. 40
²¹ Ban Son is the alias of the Monk Bao Tich (Bao Xi) under the Chinese Tang dynasty, disciple of the patriarch Ma Daoyi. He was so called because he lived in a temple on Ban Son Mountain (Ji district, Hebei province, China).
²² Chinese in original.
²³ The place where Buddha preached religion.
²⁴ The cloistering place of Bodhidharma.
²⁵ i.e. Buddha. According to legends, when Laozi came in Ho territory, he became Buddha.
²⁶ i.e. Bodhidharma.
swallowed his own voice. All Buddhas, all Ancestors hid their traces, all men without
exception got a terrible fear.”

The own nature in the invariable truth exists in everyone, everywhere and
anybody has to find it himself! “Held in the hand, the pearl is blue with its blue
colors, and bights with its yellow colors. In the old glass put on the toilet table, Ho
appear as Ho, Han appear as Han’. The illusory thing doesn’t mind because
everything is from the Buddhist body… In the nostril, Buddhist wheel moves; under
the eyebrows, valuable things appear. On the waves, the stone girl dance elegant
tunes. Playing the flute, the wooden man sings joyful songs. Yellow flowers bloom,
everywhere is the Prajñā heart. The bamboos are blue. Everything bears the signs of
the invariable truth. Let’s separate the grass to let the own life appear. Let’s dig up the
soil to cut off the life and death way.”

Thai Tong ended his article with four verses:

Strap your horse everywhere you find blue poplar.

Every family has its way to Chang An

The way back under the moon is frequented by a few people.

A ray of the moon light bights the cold earth.

There is everywhere a blue poplar to strap the horse, there is everywhere a
way to the capital that mean one can find everywhere the Buddhist nature allowing
the enlightenment. The way to go up has nothing different from the way to go back.
Few people accept to go back because of being infatuate by the obscurity, by the

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27 The monks of Chan Sect often used cry, stick, feather duster… as instruments leading
their followers so enlightenment. Here, Thai Tong wanted to say that all those instruments
would be useless if one does not search for enlightenment by himself.

28 These two sentences recall us the monk Truong Nguyen (1110-1165)’s litany under the
Ly dynasty, mentioned in the previous chapter: “The iron girl dance, the wooden man
beats the drum.”
beauty. But the light always illuminates that way.\textsuperscript{29} Once more, we hear Thai Tong calling for a return.

Tran Thai Tong’s Buddhist ideology was also expressed in old prayer reciting articles in the “Niem tung ke” contained in the \textit{Khoa hu luc}. In this article Thai Tong cited various stories or events, i.e. problems that happened in Buddhist history in general and Chan sect in particular in which he presented the \textit{Cu} (= theme) i.e. the paragraph in which the problem was the sect. Usually that problem started from a story, a sentence. Then a remark followed and was called \textit{Niem} (= rhyme) and the article ended with a recitation of a text composed by four seven-word sentences (\textit{Tung}). Up till now, there exist forty three texts of Thai Tong. Here, it may not be out of context to have a look at two of them:

\textbf{Text No 8}

\textit{Qu} (theme): the second ancestor (Tue Kha) asked Dharma to be quiet in mind and heart. Dharma said: “Give me your heart and I will make it quiet. “Tue Kha said: “I have been searching the heart but I haven’t found it.” Dharma said: “I have made you quiet in mind and in heart.”

\textit{Niem} (rhyme): “The three year old boy holds flowers, an actogenarian catches embroidered balls.

\textit{Tung} (reciting text):

When your heart is no more your heart, whom are you going to speak to?

To mute awaked from his dream screws up his eyes.

The old monk is lying about his quickness

He rocks with daughters, shows himself disinterested without knowing himself.

\textsuperscript{29} In text No. 15 of \textit{Niem tung ke}, Tran Thai Tong also wrote a rhyme: “Let’s breathe all the sublime mysteries; and on the way back, we walk under the moonlight.” Some people interpreted the way under moonlight is a sad and cold one. We think it is not true to Tran Thai Tong’s thought, which may be that “the way under the moonlight is an illuminated one.”
Bodhidharma said to Tuc Kha: “Give me your heart and I will make it quiet.” Thai Tong said frankly that was a lying. Because the heart is something one must search himself, he must search himself quietness; nobody can transmit it to him. Nevertheless the outsiders believe in stories as to transmit the heart, top make quiet, what a laughable thing! As we have seen, the thoughts of reciting text were expressed in the above mentioned text “Pho huyet huong thuong nhat in.”

**Text No 17:**

*Cu* (theme)

The monk Nam Tuyen\(^{30}\) said: The normal heart is Tao (religion)

*Niem:* (rhyme)

Feeling cold one must say cold feeling hot one must say hot.

*Tung:* (reciting text).

The pearl white from its origin doesn’t bear any take from hammer or chopper.

There’s no need of polishing to renew it.

To come back to the native land, one does no more go a long way.

It doesn’t matter if someone climbs the high mountain.

According to Thai Tong, the “normal heart” is the natural heart, not abnormal, “if it’s cold, say it’s cold, if it’s hot, say it’s hot.” It resembles the white pearl that has never borne the traces of hammer or axis. One mustn’t whittle the pearl as he mustn’t make his heart become abnormal. Keeping one’s heart normal, he masters his own nature, as when he is far, he doesn’t need going but comes straight on to his native land. Once again Thai Tong recalled the way to come back.

\(^{30}\) Nam Tuyen is an alias the Pho Nguyen (Pu Yuan in Chinese) under the Tang dynasty; he cloistered at Nam Tuyen Mountain in Chi Zhou (China) disciple of Ma Daoyi.
Like the people belonging to the Chan sect, Tran Thai Tong believed “if one has enlightenment on his nature, he will succeed, he will have good heart, everybody will be self-sufficient”31 “He has only to reflect returning light, and will become Buddha.”32 But Thai Tong thought there were many ways allowing to realize the way back to his own nature in different degrees, different manners. He said: “The own nature differs, the intelligence is different. If we show an only way, it will be difficult to enter the enlightenment. Thus Buddha largely opens the intelligence, voluntarily offers measures and shows the way back, gives medicines according to the diseases.”33

It was why Thai Tong devoted himself to leading everybody step by step on the way to Buddhist religion. He particularly paid great attention to repentance, wrote the Luc Thai Sam Hoi Khoa Nghi that meant formalities for repentance in six moments in the day; in one moment, one repents of sins committed against the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body, the mind. He also wrote the Binh Dang Le Sam Van. Thai Tong was interested in repentance as well as in observing the forbidding commandments. Even in the text Thu Luan, at the same time he appreciated observing the forbidding commandments, he stressed on repentance. He wrote five texts on the five forbidding commandment (animal killing, stealing, sexuality, lying and alcohol drinking). He analyzed the relations between commandment, decision, and intelligence in the poem “Gioi dinh tue Luan.” He promoted in that poem that it must have commandment for having decision, it must have decision for having intelligence. “To resort to commandment as preliminary good thing, to resort to decision as medium good thing, to resort to intelligence as post good thing.”34 Thus it meant decision comes first and intelligence after. While, as we know, the Chinese Chan sect of Hui Neng asserted that decision and intelligence come at the same time. Decision is in intelligence, and intelligence is in decision like the lamp and its light. Perfecting decision first and intelligence after would be like

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31 Pho khuyen phat bio de tan.
32 Pho khuyen phat bio de tan
33 Luc thoai sam hoi khoa nghi tu
34 Gioi dinh tue luan
washing and tiding up the mirror for getting the light blighting. The first way of doing was called prompt enlightenment and the second progressive enlightenment.

Obviously, Tran Thai Tong wanted to conciliate the two prompt and progressive enlightenments because “own nature distinguishes, the intelligence differs.” The conciliation between these two was clearly expressed in the text “Luan Tue Giao Giam” (Dissertation on the example of intelligence enlightenment). Beginning this dissertation, Thai Tong wrote: “Originally intelligence originates from decision. If the heart is troubled, there will be no intelligence, like the copper mirror, it must be washed first and will bright after, not having been washed it will be covered with moss and loose its luster. And once being misted, how can it give light?. That position was near that of progressive enlightenment, close to Than Tu’s point of view. But in the following part, Thai Tong wrote: “Remaining quiet and awake in right. Remaining quiet but without meditation is wrong. Remaining awake and quiet is right, but remaining awake in trouble thinking is wrong. Being awake and quiet, being quiet and awake constitutes a remedy while being without meditation or in troubled thinking constitutes a wrong doing.” This paragraph was based on the monk Huyen Giac’s thought who was Hui Neng’s disciple. And according to Huyen Giac, quietness means decision, awakening means intelligence and quietness plus awakening mean decision plus intelligence simultaneously, then it was alike Hui Neng’s point of view.

As it has been said in the previous chapter, the conciliating tendency between promptness and progressiveness had existed under the Ly’s reign. With Tran Thai Tong, that tendency developed clearly. Was that a characteristic of Vietnamese Chan sect? It was why Tran Nhan Tong attached a particular importance to prayers reciting. Buddha praying, meditative sitting. He didn’t underestimate praying: “To follow Buddha’s way, there is only one thing i.e. prayer reciting.” He also wrote the “Toa Thien Luan” to heighten the significance of the meditative sitting. He wrote.

35 In Khoa hu luc, this sentence was written with some wrong characters, which made it nonsense. We can base ourselves on the explanation made by Huyen Giac to reproduce the original made by Tran Thai Tong.
36 Huyen Giac was the native of Vinh Gia. On Chau, so he was also called Monk Vinh Gia.
37 Gioi dinh tue luan
“Although one admits all interdictions but doesn’t practice meditative sitting, the power of his decision doesn’t appear, and without the latter’s appearance, falsity is not destroyed, in that circumstance, to see the own nature is a difficult doing.”

And particularly, he called for the Buddha in his prayers. In the text “Niem Phat Luan” (Dissertation on Buddha Praying), he distinguished three kinds of people: those of upper intelligence, those of lower intelligence. For the men of upper intelligence, the Buddha is in their heart, they don’t need any more training. The men of middle intelligence, surely with the help of praying to the Buddha, paying attention to clever working, incessantly praying, get their heart pure and honest. The men of lower intelligence, always reciting the Buddha’s words, the heart willing to see the Buddha’s physiognomy, promise to themselves to be born in the Buddha’s realm. Those three levels differing on depth or superficiality have the same will for success. Thus, for the men of upper intelligence, it is easy to say but difficult to do. As for praying to the Buddha, one must get the lower intelligence men doing first. As for building a three storey tower one never sees the ground floor not being built first. In this context, once again, we see Tran Nhan Tong’s conception on different forms of religious training because of “nature distinction.”

In his “Niem Phat Luan,” Thai Tong admitted the Buddha praying from the people who wish to be born in the Buddha country, that means the people of the Pure Land; at the same time they see the necessity of praying to the Buddha among the people who believe that “the Heart is the Buddha,” i.e. the people of the Chan sect. Obviously Tran Thai Tong wanted to conciliate Chan and Amidism, or more clearly, he wanted to Chan-ize Amidism. He wrote on the “text on day break” at the end of the night: “Regard the Pure Land in front of you and accept Amitābha in your heart.” Tran Thai Tong’s conciliating tendency between Chan and Amidism had also its root in his point of view that combined the own force to the other’s. Combining Chan and Amidism was, as we have seen, a tendency that had existed in a certain number of monks under the Ly’s reign as a monk Tonh Luc (1112-1175) who prayed Buddha with both the mouth and the heart.
It might be that through his relations with the state monk Truc Lan, Tran Thai Tong acquired the tradition of the Wu Yan Tong sect and through the lay Buddhist Thien Phong acquired the influence of the Lam Te sect. Lam Te’s influence on Tram Nham Tong was very obvious. In his writings, Thai Tong recalled the theories that Lam Te Nghia Huyen had promoted as the “three important things,” the “three mysteries.” Thai Tong wrote two litanies dealing with the topic “inactive true man,” that was Lam Te’s well known story. He also wrote a poem on the shout of Lam Te:

When reaching the front door and hearing shout

Children and grand children were all out of their passions.

A spring thunderbolt has just roared,

Seeds germinate and vegetation sprouts.

But Lam Te’s influence was not boundless. As we have seen, Tran Thai Tong’s Chan theory had its particularities. He understood profound Buddhist theories but patiently interested to the ordinary men and was able to lead most of them, he affirmed himself “not to speak about the” “three mysteries” or “to look upper” yet.

One more characteristic in Tran Thai Tong’s Buddhist thought deserving attention was to combine Buddhism with Confucianism and Taoism. We have seen Thai Tong’s bright conscience in social life. Moreover, he tried to demonstrate the propinquity of those three religions. For example when discussing about meditative sitting, after having related Śākyamuni’s sitting six years long under the Himalayas, Thai Tong also related Tu Ky’s story, who “sat in his stool until his body resembled a dried wood, his heart cooled down as the ashes,” as written in Zhuangzi’s work and the story about Yan Hui, Confucius’s disciple, who “sat until he forgot himself,

38 The doctrine “three important things” of the monk Nghia Huyen, founder of Lam Te Sect, consists of: starting from “reason,” one gets to “intellect” and at last to “means.”
39 According to Lam Te sect, there are three mystiques: that in the body, that in language and that in itself.
40 One in Phao thuyet sac than and the other in Niem Tung ke.
41 Niem tung ke, text No. 16.
42 Pho khuyen phat bo de tam.
43 The story of Tu Ky was related in chapter “Qiwu lun,” Zhuangzi.
his legs and arms were utterly exhausted and lost all his intelligence”44 in order to reach this conclusion: “Those are the sages and saints of the three religions in the old time who got success with the help of meditative sitting.”45

It may be worthwhile here to have a look at another paragraph: “Despite the importance of life, life is not important as Tao. It was why Confucians said: “I am willing going to die in the evening if I could listen to Tao in the morning.”46 Laozi said: “If I have a great anxiety, it’s because I have a body.”47 The Buddha devoted himself to save a tiger searching the religion. Didn’t those three live despise their body and adore religion? Alas! Life is very important and yet once had to sacrifice it in order to reach enlightenment, much less gold and pearl and wealth which are very scornful things, why to regret them? Oh! Even in a ten family hamlet, there is a loyal man,48 why there are not in the world intelligent people! After listening to these words, one must be studious and must not be suspicious. The prayers49 said: “Whence life is lost one doesn’t get it back even ten thousands afterlives.” What a sorrow thing! It was why Confucians said50 that: If you don’t make your own effort, I don’t know how to do!51 This is sufficient to drive the point home about Tran Thai Tong’s tendency of combining three doctrines. He even wrote: “When one doesn’t understand yet, he must separate in three doctrines. After having understood, the three are in the heart.”52

In Wu Yan Tong Buddhist sect under the Ly’s reign, we have seen the tendency that conciliated the Buddhist thought with the Taoist one. In Tran Thai Tong, that combination with Confucian thoughts was strongly stressed. Even among the sins enumerated in his repentance texts, we recognize those which damaged Confucian morality, or relation between the father and his sons, the King and his citizens. Perhaps under the Tran’s reign, Confucianism was more strongly developed

44 Chapter “Da zongshi,” Zhuangzi
45 Toa thien luan.
46 In Lunyu
47 In Daode jing
48 In Lunyu
49 i.e. the Nhan qua prayer-book.
50 Confucius’s words in chapter “Zi Han,” Lunyu.
51 In Pho khuyen phat bo de tam. Some version put in Kuyen phat tam van.
52 Pho khuyen phat bo de tam.
and enjoyed a greater influence. This feature did not surprise Tran Thai Tong because he was at the same time a Buddhist and a ruling king.

**The Monk Tue Trung, a great Buddhist scholar under the Tran’s reign**

The monk Tue Trung (original name Tran Tu ng) (1230-1291) was eldest son of an Sinh Vyong Tran Lieu, and eldest brother of Hung Dao Vuong Tran Quoc Tuan and Nguyen Thanh Thien Cam (King Tran Thanh Tong’s wife and King Tran Nhan Tong’s mother). 53

Tue Trung had the royal title Hung Minh Vuong and scored victories in the two resistances against the Yuans in 1285 and in 1288. 54 Tue Trung did not leave his family and was a lay Buddhist but had a high degree of knowledge on Buddhism. As it is said above, he was the monk Tieu Dao’s disciple, and Tran Nhan Tong’s master. According to “Luoc dan thien phai do” published before *Tue Trung Thuong Si Ngu Luc*, besides Nhan Tong, Tue Trung still had other disciples as An Nhien, Thien Nhien, 55 Thach Kim 56 and Thoai Ba. 57 Tue Trung’s Buddhist thought manifested themselves in his works that remain by chance in *Tue Trung Thuong Si Ngu Luc* collection.

The extant copy of *Tue Trung Thuong Si Ngu Luc* 58 comprises four parts:

(a) In the first part, the Buddhist thoughts were presented under the conversational form between Tue Trung and his disciples. In this part, we find six litanies and fourteen prayer reciting texts from Tue Trung.

(b) The second part contained forty nine poems by Tue Trung.

53 Some one thought Tue Trung thuong si was Tran Quoc Tang, the son of Tran Quoc Tuan. That was a mistake made by Bui Juy Bich, author of *Hoang Viet van tuyen*.

54 These events had been related in *Annan zhilue* and *Yuanshi*. See Ha Van Tan and Khan Thi Tam, *Cuoc khang chien chong xam luoc Nguyen Mong the ky XIII*. Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi 1975, pp. 228 and 177.

55 Thien Nhien was a layman. One of his text appeared in *Tue Trung thuong si ngu luc*.

56 In *Tue Trung thuong si ngu luc* also appeared a text by Togn Minh. We wonder whether Tong Kinh is Thach Kinh or not.

57 Probably a female disciple.

58 The earliest extant copy, called *Truc Lam Tue Trung thuong si ngu luc*, was reproduced by the monk Tue Nguyen in the winter of the fourth year of Chinh Hoa era (1683).
(c) The third part contained seven texts written by his disciples, Nhan Tong and Phap Loa included, for Tue Trung’s memorial service.

(d) In the fourth part we read the text “Thuong si hah trang” without the mentioning the author’s name, but we surely know that it was written by Nhan Tong, and an Epilogue written by Do Khac Chung. To the text “Thuong si hah trang” we added six other litanies written by Tue Trung.

We can say that *Tue Trung Thuong Si Ngu Luc* is a very precious document helping us to do research on Buddhist thought under Tran’s reign in general but also that of Tue Trung in particular.

First of all, we see that Tue Trung’s conception on one’s own body was Śūnyatā point of view. The latter manifested itself in the following litany:

Every day, we face the nature i.e. the phenomena universe.

The nature is the reflection from the heart.

But both nature and heart are originally nothing.

Everywhere is pāramitā.

Such a point of view is very close to Nāgārjuna’s Mādhyamika. So we can think pāramitā of which Tue Trung spoke here is the prajna-paramita. According to Nāgārjuna, when the Prajñā i.e. intelligence appears, it can return to Śūnyatā.

Tue Trung also recalled the Śūnyatā point of view in many occasions: “The Four Greatnesses were originally nothing. Where did they emerge from?” (see text “Sinh tu nhan nhi di”). “The heart and the religion were originally nothing and silence, where can one search for them? (text: “Doi Co”). “The affiliations are irregular, all are nothing” (text “Phat Tam ca”). “Truth and Error are nothing” (text “van su quy nhu”) etc.

On the basis of such an onto logic point of view on Śūnyatā, Tue Trung set a particular views that was “not to see things separately in two.”
Tue Trung asserted that the nature of the phenomena being nothing, every opposition between the phenomena is artificial, having no basis. It is only due to the “view separating things in two.” He said:

The body is formed from nothing, so it was originally nothing.

Being mystified, it is separated in two, that means to be

Separated in two aspects opposing each other.

The self and the other, we are separated in two but are linked alike the dew, the frost.

The simple living being and the Saint have no difference and are alive the thunder and the lightning\(^{59}\)

Tue Trung categorically denied the “view in two.” He declared:

One only needs to abandon the “view to two”

He can embrace everything in the Buddhist universe\(^{60}\)

With that comprehension on that “view in two,” Tue Trung asserted the non-existence of opposition between various concepts, various categories which the people had opposed each other. He dealt once and again with this problem in many poem’s many litanies. For example, in the text “Me Ngo Bat Di” (no difference between unconsciousness and awaking), he rejected the opposition between “non being” and “being,” between unconsciousness and awaking. Since long, being and non-being, unconsciousness and awaking, have had the same meaning. In the text “Pham Thanh bat di” (no difference between the lay men and the Saint), he rejected the opposition between those two creatures, between the “right” and the “wrong,”

\(^{59}\) In the text “Pham thanh bat di” (There is no difference between ordinary people and the Saints).

\(^{60}\) Excerpt from the text “Me ngo bat di” (There is no difference between unconsciousness and awakening).
between the “good” and the “evil,” between Buddha and the simple being between the other and the self. In the poem “Van su nhu y,” he rejected the opposition between “to be” and “not to be,” between the sorrows and the bodies, between truth and falsity:

**From nonbeing appears being**

Being and nonbeing will be equal in the end. The sorrows and the Bodhis have no difference.

> Truth and falsity both are nothing.

> The body is as mystic zed, life is as a shadow, the heart resembles the light wind, the nature resembles.

> Don’t speak of life and death, of demons and Buddhas.

> All the stars turn to the North, all rivers flow to the East⁶¹ Tue Trung went on rejecting the opposition between truth and falsity in the text “Thi chung.” He made his point of view clearer in the poem “Phat tan ca.”

> To abandon falsity in the heart in order to guard the true nature, that is like to go and fetch the image in loosing the mirror.

> Not to see the image appearing in the mirror is like falsity appearing in truth.

> Falsity comes, it is neither true nor false.

> Like the mirror, it is neither good nor evil.

> From the point of view of the “view in two,” Tue Trung criticized the adherence of concepts. Let us read a paragraph in the “Doi co.”

> A monk stepped forward and asked: “What is the clean Buddhist body?” Tue Trung said:

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That body comes in and out stepping on the urine of buffalos.

And its feet trample on horse excrements.

The monk asked again: “How to attain enlightenment?”

Tue Trung answered: The abandonment of the concept on dirtiness makes the Buddhist body clean.

Please listen to my litany:

At the origin, there is no dirtiness, no cleanness

Dirtiness, cleanness both are nothing

The Buddhist body doesn’t care

What is dirt and what is clean.

We can say that Tue Trung presented in a definite and strict manner his point of view on the “view in two.” The thing deserving attention is that although bearing a character of relativism, his point of view did not lead Tue Trung to the nihilist negation. But on the contrary, owing to that point of view, he god rid of all restraints in his thinking and living way. Like other Buddhist followers, Tue Trung adopted the “Heart is Buddha” point of view, closely linking the Heart to Buddha. In the first part of his poem “Phat tam ca,” he presented clearly that point of view:

Buddha, Buddha, Buddha, no one can see you!

Heat, Heart, Heart, no one can speak of you!

Buddha appears when the Heart appears.

When Buddha passes away, the Heart also disappears too.

Nowhere the Heart disappears while Buddha exists

Never Buddha passes away while the Heart still appears
Loyal to his points of view on “non being” and “the view in two,” Tue Trung clearly stated:

In the past, there was no heart, and now there is no Buddha. That assertion may be understood as “in the past, there was no Buddha, and now there is no Heart,” because as we have seen above, according to Tue Trung, Buddha is nowhere and the Heart is nowhere too and vice versa. And if it is so, how will be the consciousness awaking? Does the goal and the object of the consciousness awaking exist any more?

We can find Tue Trung’s explanation in the following sentences in the poem “Phat tam ca”:

The heart of all Buddhists is the Buddha’s heart.

The Buddha’s heart is in concordance with mine. That law has existed as such forever!

From that Tue Trung’s thought, we can elaborate the following formula:

All living beings heart = the Buddha’s heart = self heart.

All beings are the nature, the phenomena universe surrounding us. According to Tue Trung’s presentation, the heart of all living beings is the evident evolution of the nature. That is the reason of which he spoke in his poem “:Phat tam ca.”

Whence spring comes, the spring flowers will naturally blossom.

And whence autumn returns, evidently autumnal water flows over.

He also recalled that natural law in other poems. For example, in the poem “An dinh thoi tiet.”

Every year, the flowers blossom in the third month.

Every morning, the cocks crow in the middle watch.

In the actual language, that is a natural law.
In this context, Tue Trung wanted to put forward the principle. Set our heart in accordance with all living being’s hearts, thus we reach Buddha’s heart. And understanding this problem, we live in accordance with the natural law that means consciousness awaking.

Live in line with public life; don’t act against the law of the nature. That was Tue Trung’s living principles. Tran Nhan Tong once wrote about him as follows: “He lived in the earthy life, mixed light with dust, made no offence against anything.”

That remark from a disciple towards his master was very accurate. It is easy to understand that, from his principle of living conformable to the natural law, Tue Trung rejected the diet regime and the observance of the commandments. The following litanies express clearly that point of view.

Easting vegetables or eating meat are attributes of different species of living beings. That is as natural as the vegetation blossoms in spring. Thus, why do we call sin the meat eating and happiness the vegetable eating? Observing the commandments and resigning oneself only lead to sin and not to happiness. One must know that sin and happiness don’t reside in the observance of the commandments and resigning oneself. To preserve oneself or to resign oneself in such a manner is like a man who climbs a tree. Being in safety on the soil, he wants to go and seeks the danger, if he doesn’t climb the tree, he will run no danger even the wind blows!

Observance of the commandments and resignation are the two important points in the six cardinal virtues of Buddhism. But Tue Trung rejected them in a rash manner. Further, he said: “Living in accordance with the laws, one isn’t afraid of them and gets freedom.” On the problem of death and life, Tue Trung wrote the poem “Sinh tu nhan nhi di” (live or die is only leisure). The title shows the author’s attitude. Let’s read the two last sentences:

Only the ignorance and confused man is afraid of life and death

A lettered and knowledgeable man considers them as leisure. In the text “An dinh thoi
„tiet,” he also said:

Don’t ask anymore about the origin of life and death.

They are natural results of the functioning of the causes and factors.

The text “Phong cuong ngam” manifested fully the spirit of a free and disporting man:

Let’s look at the universe, how immense it is! With a rod in the hand, up to where are we wandering, water is very deep and spreads out. Mountain is very high, mountain is towering. Being tired, we sleep; a village “where is it”?

The two last sentences showed his attitude towards life and death:

The problem is whether I can realize my aspiration; I do successfully what I wish to do.

**If life and death pursue me, they don’t matter with me**

Tue Trung’s spirit of courage before the natural. Law approximated Van Hanh’s “no fear” spirit, a monk under the Ly’s reign; the latter wrote:

The body is like lighting, it appears then disappears. That is as natural as the vegetation blossoms in spring and fades in autumn. Prosperity follows recession according to the destiny. I am not afraid. Towards me, prosperity and recession are comparable to a dew drop on the blade of grass.

In the poem “Truu Nguyen Ngam,” Tue Trung expressed the same opinion:

In the life of a man, prosperity and poverty happen.

Flowers are sometimes fresh and beautiful but sometimes dry and fade.

A country is sometimes prosperous, sometimes decadent.

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Destiny knows sometimes prosperity, sometimes misfortunes; The day has its evening and its morning.

The year ends while another begins.

Both Van Hanh and Tue Trung searched for natural law and did they begin to perceive the dialectics of the movement of things. In the poem “The thai hu ao,” Tue Trung wrote:

The moon sets in the West; its shadow doesn’t come back.

Water flows to the East Sea, its waves can’t flow back.

Men not only have to live conformably to the laws of the nature, but also in accordance with the law of the society. Thus Tue Trung wrote:

If one is driven to be nude, he has to joyfully take his habit off.

It isn’t his fault not to observe the etiquette but he has to submit to the human customs.64

Obeying to the destiny in accordance with the law of nature, submitting to the customs in accordance with the laws of life, here was the characteristic of Tue Trung’s Chan thoughts. To live a full life, in accordance with the nature, with the men, with the heart, not to beg anywhere, anybody, that’s Chan Buddhism. No need of meditative sitting. He said: “The monks sit in meditative position while I do not.”65 Then he expressed his conception on Chan Buddhism in two wonderful verses in the poem “Phat tamb ca”:

In walking there is Chan Buddhism, in sitting there is also Chan Buddhism. In the fire of the burning furnace, a lotus blossoms.

64  In the text “Vat bat nang dung.”
65  In the text “Sinh tu nhan nhi di.”
Even in sitting position in contemplating the beauty of the nature, one feels quietness in the heart, then where is the need for ritual Chan Buddhism meditative sitting!

In the middle of the house, one sits in silence

and leisurely contemplates Con Lon with its trial of smoke.

When one is tired, his hear twill automatically rest

He needs neither reciting prayers nor meditation.\(^{66}\)

It seems all Tue Trung’s points of view on Buddhist meditation, on religion, on life were concisely expressed in the poems “Thi Chung:”

I don’t look any more for Thieu that and Tao Khe.

The nature of the body is so radiant that nothing can hide it.

I never mind that, the moon sheds its lights everywhere.

I also don’t mind that, the wind blows high or low in the air.

The colour of that autumn changes from white to black.

The dirty mud can’t sully that perfume lotus.

The wonderful song is sung ever and ever.

Don’t go to seek it in the East, the West, the North, the South!... That wonderful song is religion, and was resounding in the path of life on which Tue Trung had been eagerly walking with a stick in hand: I can’t find the three meters of the Song Lam, I look in vain for the six circles of Dia Tang. How thorny is the road on earth, Despite my old age, I don’t hesitate to walk on it not as I did before.\(^{67}\)

\(^{66}\) In the text “Ngau tac.”

\(^{67}\) In the text “Tru truong tu,” translated by Hue Chi.
Tran Nhan Tong, founder of the Truc Lam sect

The history of the cloistering of the Truc Lam sect’s three founders was related in the book *Tam To Thuc luc*. Despite its late publications about at the middle of the 18th century, that book had copied a certain number of ancient texts. The first part, speaking about Tran Nhan Tong was an excerpt from the book *Thanh Dang Luc* (the earlier still extant was published by 1750) and we believe it contained many documents on the Tran’s reign. The second part written on the monk Phap Loa, was a copy from an inscription on an ancient stele erected under that reign. At present, we have found that stele, i.e. the stele of the Vien Thong Tower in Thanh Mai, erected in 1362 and confirming the value of what was related about the monk Phap Loa in the book *Tam To Thuc Luc*. The third part written about the monk Huyen Quang was named *To Gia Thuc Luc*. Despite many corrections undertaken under the let’s reign, it was surely constituted from an earlier document.

On the basis of those documents, we know something about the Buddhist activities of Truc Lam sect’s founders. The King Nhan Tong named Tran Khan (1258-1308), King Thanh Tong Tran Hoang’s son, was enthroned in 1278. He was the King Hero who won the two wars against the Yuan in 1285 and 1288. In 1293, he abdicated in favors of Anh Tong and played the role of the King Father. When he still was an heir prince and a King, Nhan Tong adored Buddha and did research on Buddhism under the direction of his maternal uncle named Tue Trung. After his abdication, in 1295, he had the intention to leave definitively his family for Vu Lam. But he came back home without giving any reason. Only in 1289, when he cut off with his family and came to cloister in the Yen Tu Mountain.

Since then, he took the Buddhist name of Truc Lam the great anchoret, made himself called Huong Van dai dau da. He was also called Truc Lam Dieu Ngu. In this part, instead of calling him by his Buddhist title, we call him Nhan

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68 The earliest extant copy was printed in the 16th year of Canh Hung era (1765).
69 The stele was carved in the 5th Dai Tru era (1362), being extant at Thanh Mai pagoda, on Tam Ban mountain, Hoang Hoa Tham commune, Chi Linh district. Hai Hung province.
70 Vu Lam belonged to former Yen Khanh district, present day Hoa La district, Ha Nam Ninh province.
Tong for all conveniences, Nhan Tong had the conscience to build and consolidate a unified Buddhist clergy. Despite his cloistering in Yen Tu, he often went to many other pagodas in the country as the Pho Minh pagoda in Thien Truong, Sung Nghiem pagoda in Chi Linh, Bao an pagoda in Sieu Loi, Vinh Nghiem pagoda in Lang Giang... where he organized courses and lectures on Buddhism for the monks coming from elsewhere, came up to the camp Bo Chinh\(^7\) where he built the small temple Tri Kien; and in 1301, he came to Champa to meet the king of that country. In this meeting, Nhan tong promised to marry princess Huyen Tran to Che Man, Champa’s king. It was probable that through such a marriage, Nhan Tong wanted to build peaceful relations between the Dai Viet and the Champa.

According to *Tam To Thuc Luc* in 1304, Nhan Tong ‘went to everywhere in the countryside, annulled the lewd language, instructed the people to do the “ten good things.”’\(^7\) Nhan Tong obviously wanted to make of the “ten good things” a morality of Buddhism serving as a basis for social morality. In his trip in 1304, Nhan Tong met Phap Loa in Nam Sach. Since then, he coached and educated that man to become his own Buddhist follower. In 1308, Phap Loa was officially entrusted the role of the second founder of the Truc Lam sect. Phap Loa’s succession was organized in a solemn ceremony. The inscription on the stele of Vien Thong Tower in Thanh Mai as well as the *Tam To Thuc Luc* related that even as follows:

> “On the first day of the first month of the 16\(^{th}\) year of Hung Long era, Mau Than (1308), the monk (i.e. Phap Loa) obeyed the destiny to be a voluntary Buddhist residing in the Cam Lo, Sieu Loai pagoda.\(^\text{73}\) The inaugurating ceremony and the parade started before the founder’s tablets, solemn music sounded, sandal and incense were burnt. The King-Father (i.e. Nhan Tong) led the monk to kowtow before the founders’ altar. After the song, Nhan Tong ordered playing music, beating the big drums, grouping everybody in the altar. Then King Anh Tong came

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71 Present day Bo Trach, Quang Trach district, Binh Tri Thien province 4.
73 i.e. Bao An pagoda at Sieu Loai.
in his quality as the Great Donator for Buddhism, he stood at his guest place in the
temple. The Prince Prime Minister 74 stood with other dignitaries in the court yard.
Nhan Tong went up to the Sermon tribune to preach Buddhism. After having
finished preaching, he got down, let the monk to the tribune, stood opposite to him,
clasped his hands as a regard. The monk rendered the kowtow. Nhan Tong handed
him the Buddhist habit. Then Nhan Tong sat in the rattan chair 75 put side long to
listen to the monk’s Buddhist lecture. In the end, Dieu Ngu named Phap Loa
resident monk of the Sieu Loai pagoda in charge of the monastery Yen Tu and
second successor of the Truc Lam sect.”

Through that ceremony, we can see Nhan Tong’s organizing talent. It was
obvious that, he wanted that the Buddhist followers as well as the King and the
dignitaries to assist at the ceremony of the Buddhist habit transmitting to Phap Loa.
Such a ceremony would consolidate the prestige of the Buddhist clergy leader in the
future.

The Buddhist propagation ceremony was opened on the first day of the lunar
year Mau Than (1308). On the eleventh month of that year, Nhan Tong died in the
summit Ngoa Van.

Besides Phap Loa, the disciples of the Truc Lam sect were Bao at, Bao Phac,
Phap Khong, Phap Co, Huc Nghiem, Phap Trang, Huong Trang, Huong Son, Mat Tang.

According to Tam to thuc luc, Nhan Tong wrote the following books:

1. Thien Lam thiet chu y ngu luc
2. Truc Lam hau luc
3. Thach that mi ngu
4. Dai Huong Hai An thi Tap

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74 i.e. Tran Quoc Chan.
75 “Khuc luc sang” or “khuc luc thang sang” (rattan chair or bed) in the original, often used
by Buddhist circles.
5. Tang gia toai su

Regrettably, these books are irretrievably lost. Only a certain number of his poems remain and are published in the *Viet Am thi tap* and *Toan viet thi luc*. Particularly Nhan Tong wrote in Nom and at present we fortunately find two poems, the “Cu tran lac dao phu” and the “Dac thu lam tuyen thanh dao ca.” Nhan Tong also wrote the article “Thuong si hanh trang” that was Tue Trung’s biography, at the end of the book *Trung thuong si ngu luc*.

Thus, we have got not so many documents allowing us to penetrate Tran Nhan Tong’s thoughts on Buddhism. At present, there are two documents that express in the main lines those thoughts. Those documents related two consultations between Nhan Tong and his disciples, one is Sung Nghiem pagoda, in Chi Linh mountain and the other in the Ky Lan monastery also situated in Chi Linh. The first part was related in *Thanh Dang luc* and also in *Tam To Thuc Luc*, in the chapter on Nhan Tong. The second part was related in *Thien Dao Yeu Hoc*, after the chapter on Phap Loa in *Tam To thuc luc*. That part might be recorded by Phap Loa.

In the long enough consultation in the Sung Nghiem pagoda, Nhan Tong presented his point of view through short litany sentences on a series of problems as the Trinity (Buddha, law, Sangha), three bodies (three reincarnations of Buddha), the pure Buddhist body, the way that leads upper … The fundamental point of view in that context was the “non-engagement” of the Vajra-prajna that was developed as approximately a Tue Trung Thoung Si thoughts, and rejected any fastening to the concept.76

At the end of that consultation, Nhan tong read the litany “Huu cu vo cu” dealing with to be and not to be. The thoughts in the litany were very profound and rejected the engagement attitude of to be and not to be. From that very long litany, we quoted only some excerpts:

76 For instance, when being asked what is a pure Buddhist body, Truc Lam answered:
In the golden bottle of wine, there are the lion’s excrements,
On the iron cup of wine, there is the smell of francolin.
This thought could be associated with that of Tue Trung on the same topic, as mentioned above.
To be, to be! Not to be, not to be!

When the creepers dried, the tree fell down.

The monks hit their heads and their skulls break down!

To be, to be!, not to be, not to be!

The autumnal wind blows

Many and many sharp swords hit each other

To be, to be! Not to be, not to be!

Defining principles, founding sects

Drilling turtle shell, breaking tiles

Escalating mountains, splashing through the water.

To be, to be! Not to be, not to be!

There is nothing

Carving a junk to find a sword,

To buy a horse after the image.

To be, to be, not to be, not to be.

Misfortune, sadness, compassion

Cut off very kind of creeper
Delight will come everywhere\textsuperscript{77}

When presenting the problems on Buddhism Nhan Tong also used cries and sticks, that proved he was influenced by the “raise the sick” method of the Lam Te’ sect. He often used images which manifested his spirit of poet, similar to Tue Trung but about the contents, he wasn’t as original as and didn’t create as strong impact as the latter.

In the consultation in the Ky Lan monastery in the 9\textsuperscript{th} day of the first month of the year Binh Ngo (1306), Nhan Tong expressed in a paragraph, very clearly his onto logic and cognitive view; it was at the same time the point of view of the Truc Lam sect that we had recognized in Tran Thai tong and Tue Trung Thuong Si. The great religions is all, it isn’t attached to anything. Its nature is quiet, pure, not good, not evil. Because of distinction and choice, that one is led to many ways. Thus one must know that, sin and happiness are one thing, cause and effect are not real things. Everybody has his own nature, everybody enjoys success. The Buddhist nature and the Buddhist body are like the body and its shadow, sometimes disappearing sometimes appearing, they are neither close nor separated. They are under the nose, at the same line of the eyebrows, but it’s difficult for the eyes to see them. One can’t find Buddhism it he has the intention to go and search for it. Three thousand Buddhist methods are very near to you, innumerable wonderful uses exist already in your heart. If you have got all the commandments, you have to look into yourself, your own heart. Your voice, your laugh, your face, a wink of your eyes, the holding of your hands, and the walking with your feet: what is that Nature?

What Heart does that Nature belong to? The Heart and the Nature both are clear, which is true, which is untrue? Buddhist doctrine is Nature, Buddha is Heart, thus what Nature is not Buddhist doctrine and what Heart is not Buddha? The Heart is Buddha and the Heart is Buddhist religion too. But because “Buddhist doctrine is originally no doctrine” thus it is the Heart as to say “the Heart is no heart” and “the

\textsuperscript{77} This litany started from the following story: Quy Son (i.e. the monk Linh Huu under the Tang dynasty in China) said: “Sometimes say yes, sometimes say no, like the bindweed climbing on the tree.” Son asked: “when the tree falls, the bindweed withers up, what we would say.” Note that Tran Thai Tong had also written a text on this problem.
Heart is Buddha” (also means Buddha is not Buddha)! That Buddhist ideology might be received by Nhan Tong from Tue Trung Thuong Si.

On the ode written in Nom “Cu tran lac dao”78 Nhan Tong’s point of view were presented in a more comprehensive manner:

“Provided one gets confidence
There are no more other magic’s,
Keeping silence, the nature will be assured.
The aspiration restrained, it doesn’t want to die.
The ego destroyed, the truth comes out.
All ambitions wiped out,
Pure Land is pureness of the Heart.
Don’t be suspicious and don’t ask about the West Land.

Amitābha is the start that quietly illumines no need to find the way to the Land of the Bliss.

Knowing the absolute truth, believing the prajñā, doesn’t find Buddha in the west or in the east.

Getting the nature of Buddha, it isn’t worthy asking for Buddhist prayers from the South or the North.

Buddha is in one’s house.

No need to find him farther.

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78 Meaning “living in a dusty world, one still enjoys practicing religion.”
Because I have forgotten my own nature, I have to find Buddha.

When my consciousness is awaked, the Buddha is myself.

…I do not mind I have no heart.

And naturally I am suitable to the religion.

Stopping the three karmas, I get my heart quiet.

When I got a heart, I understand very well the fender’s doctrine”

The Vietnamese “long” used in the ode in Nom characters means the heart. Returning to the Heart, I find Buddha in the house,” no need to search anywhere. It’s sure that ode was written for the mass. It ended with the poem:

In this world enjoying religion depends on one’s destiny.

Being hungry, I eat, being tired, I sleep instantly.

Precious things are in my house, where do I look for?

In front of every phenomenon, if have no heart, it will be no use to ask religion.79

Nhan Tong learnt Buddhism and Chan ideology from Tue Trung. But in personal character, he differed from his master in many points. He was not only a poet, he also was a king. And when he cut off with his family, he was not only a Monk; he was the leader of the clergy. He couldn’t wander as he wanted like Tue Trung. He always had to be very busy with the works we call today organization, education and training cadres…

We can think that after having cut off with his family, Nhan Tong had a quiet look at the spring passing.

In my young age, I didn’t understand the begging and not being.

The flowers blossoming in spring troubled my heart.

Now I have got familiar with the Spring Queen.

Setting on the Buddhist mat, I look at the Spring Queen.

But in fact, Nhan Tong always called every body not to let springs passing by but to do some thing for Buddhism as well as for ordinary life. He started the great visit to the Sung Nghiem pagoda in Chi Linh mount with the following poem:

The body is like the exhalation in the nose when we breathe.

Life is like the clouds flying with the winds blowing on the far mountain.

The cuckoo sings incessantly days and months

Don’t let spring pass by in a banal manner.

In his great visit to the Ky Lan monastery, Nhan Tong called once again: “Oh, me! The time passes quickly; life passes quickly, life passes away with no stop! How can you eat soup or rice without seeking knowledge about the bowl, the spoon?”

It seems that Nhan Tong showed himself very eager when he found he did not have much time. Thus, we can understand why in the last moments of his life, he recommended his two servants To Do Anh and Hoan Trung, the men who helped him climbing up the Ngoa Van summit: “Come down and take care of your religious life. Don’t think that life and death problem is an easy thing.”

Did he differ from Tue Trung? Perhaps not. Life and death are easy things but don’t waste your life! And in that meaning, life is not an easy thing. The integration in life in Tran Nhan Tong’s thoughts on Buddhist was clearly manifested in this point.
Phap Loa and Huyen Quang

Phap Loa (1284-1330) originally named Dong Kien Cuong was born in Dong Hoa, Cuu La village, Nam Sach district. In 1304, he cut off with his family, followed Nhan Tong and was named Thien Lai. At the beginning, he was sent to learn with the chief monk Tinh Giac in Quynh Quan. Afterwards, he accompanied Nhan Tong to attend the latter’s lectures. In 1305, Nhan Tong gave him the Buddhist titles of Monk and Bodhisattva and the Buddhist name Phap Loa. In 1306, he was appointed chief lecturer in the Bao An pagoda in Sieu Loai. In 1307, Nhan Tong explained the book collection *Dai Tue Ngu Luc* to Phap Loa and a certain number of disciples. In the same year, in the Ngoc Van summit, he was entrusted in Nhan Tong with preaching habit of litanies keeping work. On the first day of the year Mau Than (1308), he was officially given the Buddhist habit and named second founder of the Truc Lam sect, in the solemn ceremony mentioned in the previous part. So, after only four years from a man who had just cut off with his family, Phap Loa became the leader of the Buddhist clergy. He was then only twenty four years old.

In the epoch when Phap Loa assumed the leadership of the clergy, Buddhism developed intensively. It was the epoch that scored a great number of people who had cut off with their families. According to stele of the Vien Thong tower as well as the book *Tam To Thu Luc*, in the ninth month of the twenty-first year of Hung Long area (1313), Phap Loa came to Vinh Nghiem Pagoda in Giang 80 to define the functions of the monks in the whole country. Since then, all the letters were registered and were subjected to Phap Loa’s authority. Doing so, he made a progress in organizing a unified clergy. We can say that Vinh Nghiem pagoda became the central office of the Truc Lam clergy. At that time, he consecrated more than one thousand monks. Since then, every three years, he did the same for not less than a thousand. Up to the last yarn of Khai Huu era (1392), Phap Loa got 15,000 monks and nuns consecrated.

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80 Vinh Nghiem pagoda also called Duc La, is located in present day Tri Yen commune, Yen Dung district, Ha Bac province.
A great number of pagodas and towers were built in Phap Lao’s lifetime. Personally he built, up to 1329, two ensembles of big pagodas i.e. Bao An and Quynh Lam, 5 towers and 200 monasteries. Particularly in the Bao An pagoda (Sieu Loai) in 1314, he ordered the construction of 33 installations comprising Buddha temples, prayer keeping garrets and monasteries. He also built small pagodas as Ho Thien, Chan Lac, an Ma, Vinh Khem, Hac Lai and enlarged the pagoda ensembles Thanh Mai and Con Son. His disciples also constructed pagodas and towers in many regions. For example, one of his disciples named monk Tri Thu constructed the tower Linh Te in Duc Thuy Mountain (i.e. the Non Nuoc Mountain, in Hinh Binh\(^81\) province) and the tower Hien Dieu in Tien Long Mountain, Hoa Lu district, Ha Nam Ninh province.\(^82\) Phap Loa enjoyed a strong support from the royal and noble circles. It was then the time when the nobles vied one with another to cut off with their families or to worship Buddhism at home. On the list of Phap Loa’s disciples in the scheme drawn at the end of the stele of the Vien Thong tower, we read the name of Kings Anh Tong and Minh Tong, Queen Mother Tuyen Tu\(^83\), dignitary Van Hue Vuong, Chong Van, Eldest princess Thien Trinh.

Thanks to the help of the noble circles, economic possibilities of the Truc Lam clergy’s installation were very abundant. The pagodas got a lot of rice fields. According to that stele, Phap Loa was given by King Anh Tong 100 acres of rice fields in Doi gia hamlet as well as ploughed slaves to which were added 25 other acres in Dai Tu hamlet, originally imperial concubine Tu Chieu’s properties. Afterwards Anh Tong gave him 80 more acres in an Dinh hamlet and ploughed slaves. In 1312, the same King Niem Nhu for servings “permanently properly used for Buddha worship.” The Queen Mother Tuyen Tu gave to that monk 300 acres as permanent property of the Sieu Loai pagoda. In 1315, Anh Tong gave 30 more acres taken from imperial servant Pham as the monk’s permanent property.\(^84\) In 1316, Phap Loa founded Quynh Lam monastery in 1318, the layman Vu Hoa Luu

\(^{81}\) According to *Linh Te Phap ky* by Truong Han Sieu, written in 1343.

\(^{82}\) According to the stele in Thap Mountain. Ninh Hoa commune, Hoa Lu district, Ha Nam Ninh province. The text of the inscription on the stele was written by Tran Nguyen Trac in 1367.

\(^{83}\) Nhan Tong’s wife.

\(^{84}\) Alias of Tran Quang Trieu, Tran Quoc Tang’s son, Tran Quoc Tuan’s grandson.
offered 20 acres taken from his farm as permanent property of Quynh Lam Pagoda. In 1321, the layman Di Loan, Princess Nhat Tran’s son, offered 300 acres of rice field in Thanh Hoa district. The dignitary Van Hue Vuong also offered 300 acres of rice field in Thanh Hoa district. Queen Mother Bao Tu\textsuperscript{85} offered 22 more acres in An Hoa district. The dignitary Van Hue Vuong also offered 300 acres in Gia Lam with the farm Dong Gia, the farm An Luu, which made altogether more than one thousand acres, plus more than one thousand ploughed slaves, all that was Quynh Lam pagoda’s permanent properties.

For every construction of pagodas, making up of statues, the King and the nobles offered a great deal of properties. For examples in the molding of one thousand Buddha statues in 1322, Phap Loa enjoyed the help of many people including the Queen Mother Bao Tu, the State Mother Bao Hue, princess Bao Van, Van Hue Vuong, Uy Hue Vuong, Dai Quang Vuong, Chuong Nha Hau, Hung Uy Hoai Ninh Hua, Trinh Trung Tu, Doan Nhu Hai, Dang Thanh.

In his life time, Phap Loa molded more than 1,300 big and small bronze statues, more than 100 earth statues and made two sets of Buddha images in painted material. Beside the construction of pagodas, the making up of statues, an important activity undertaken by Phap Loa was to organize the prayer lecturing associations and the printing of documents on Buddhism. That monk lectured on Tue Trung’s prayer books as \textit{Truyen Dang Luc, Tuyet Dau Ngu Luc, Dat Tue Ngu Luc} and other prayers as \textit{Kim Cuong, Vien Gia, Thu Lang Nghiem, Duy Ma} especially the \textit{Hoa Nghiem} prayers that constituted at that time a object for the public interest. Phap Loa himself lectured at nine Hoa Nghiem prayer associations and did the same of afterwards in various pagodas. More than one thousand people attended at each of his lectures, or at least 5 or 6 hundred.

In 1311, Phap Loa received the order to continue with the publication of the \textit{Tripitaka}. This work had begun when Nhan Tong was still alive, about 1295, after Tran Khac Dung and Pham Thao brought back those prayers from the Yuan. Phap Loa entrusted the monk Bao Sat, one of Nhan Tong’s disciples with the printing of the

\textsuperscript{85} King Anh Tong’s wife, King Minh Tong’s mother.
Tripitaka prayers. And perhaps that work was ended in 1319. In the same year, Phap Loa called the Buddhist people and the laymen to offer their blood serving to the printing of those prayers. And more than 5,000 prayers books printed in that manner were kept in Quynh Lam monastery. In 1322, Phap Loa ordered carving on wood blocks the printing of the book *Tu Phan Luat* (commandment-law for the bonzes). He got more than 5,000 books printed in such a manner. Afterwards he invited the State monks Tong Kinh living in Tien Du Mountain and Bao Phuc living in Vu Ninh mountain to come and lecture on that book in Sieu Loai pagoda. That monk got a certain number of documents written by himself done in that manner, as the *Kim Cuong trang da la ni kinh khoa chu*

He wrote the following documents:

1. *Tham Thien chi yeu*

2. *Kam Cuong trang da la ni kinh khoa chu*

3. *Niet ban dai kinh khoa so*

4. *Phao hoa kinh khoa so*

5. *Lang gia tu quyen khoa so*

6. *Bat nha lam kinh kho su*

7. *Phap su khoa van*

8. *Do mon tro thanh lap*

9. *Nhan vyong ho quoc nghi quy*

Except those books, Phap Loa edited the *Tue Trung thuong ngu luc* and wrote the epilogue for the *Tripitaka*. Phao Loa’s works were all lost. Thus we have got various kinds of contradictions and related problems in our researches on this monk’s thoughts on Buddhism. Many people assumed that the text *Thien Dao yeu luoc* related after the story of Phap Loa published in *Tam To Thuc Luc* was indeed that of Phap
Loa. That opinion was highly probable. Perhaps that even was the book Tham thien chi yeu or a part of it. The book Thien Dao Yeu Luoc related Nhan Tong’s lecture in his solemn visit in Ky Lan monastery in the year Binh Ngo (1306). That book quoted Tue Trung’s litany sentences. In that work we can see the obvious influence of the Lam Te Sect.

More or less, when speaking about Buddhism in Phao Loa’s epoch we cannot omit the influence of Tantrism. Compared with Buddhism under the Ly’s reign, Buddhism at the beginning of the Tran’s reign bore less influence of Tantrism. We can see clearly that view through Thai Tong’s and Tue Trung Thuong Si’s works. But in Phap Loa epoch, the influence of that religion obviously was strength ended. One of the Tantric rites- the abhiśeka ceremony i.e. the magic water sprinkling – was undertaken in a generalized manner. In 1318, carrying out the King’s decree, Phap Loa went to search for the Indian monk named Panditaśrī (?) to translate, write and publish Kim Cuong trang da la ni kinh khoa chu i.e. the explanation on the text for the Tantric prayers –Vajramāndala dhārani. Even the book Thien Dao Yeu Hoc mentioned Buddha Vairocana as the one who is the highest ranking Buddha in Tantrism.

The increase of Tantrism influence in that epoch was only a natural development of Vietnamese Buddhism. The factors of that development were its spread in all strata of the people and the probable impact of other elements. The first was the arrival in Vietnam of many Indian or Central Asian monks who had the Tantric tendencies. For instance, monk Du Chi Ba Lam who came for the first time under Nhan Tong’s reign, and then for the second time during Anh Tong’s reign. Monk Bodhiśrī came during Minh Tong’s reign and monk Ban De Da O Tra That Loi as related above. The second element was that in China, Buddhism under the Yuan’s reign bore deeply the Tantrism character. It was probable that the Tripitaka printed under the Yuan reign and brought back under the Tran reign contained many Tantric prayers. A certain number of monks living under the Yuan reign also came to Vietnam. For example, in 1318, Phap Loa received monk Wu Fang who hailed from Human.
Phap Loa died in 1330. The stele of the Vien Thong tower in Thanh Mai Mountain where he was buried, says that he had more than 30 disciples. Beside Huyen Quang, Phap Loa had several closest disciples such as Canh Huy, Hue Nhien, Hue Chuc, Hai An.

Huyen Quang (1254-1334) was the third patriarch of Truc Lam Sect. Originally named Ly Tai Dao, he was born in the Van Tai hamlet, belonging to the lower Bac Giang district (renamed Van Tu commune under the Le’s reign, Gia Dinh district, belonging now to the Gia Luong district. Ha Bac province). He was graduated and became a mandating. In 1305, at the age of 51, he cut himself off from his family. At the beginning, he followed the monk Bao Phap’s courses in Lo Vinh pagoda. Afterwards, he followed Nhan Tong for some years, helping him to write several books as the *Chu Pham Kinh, Cong van tap, Thich Khoa Giao*. After Nhan Tong’s death, he followed Phap Loa and became the nearest disciple of a master who was thirty years younger than him. Afterwards, he came to reside in Van Yen pagoda on the Yen Tu Mountain. But only a short time after, he came to cloister in Thanh Mai pagoda and then came to Con Son pagoda. When Phap Loa was ill and stayed in An Lac Mountain, he came to look after him. When Phap Loa died in 1330, he was 77. Although he accepted to be the third patriarch of Truc Lam Sect, he returned all the same to Con Son to live as a secluded monk. Hereafter is his intimate confidence, after having been a self-cloistering man, he declares:

My virtues are frail and I am confused for having succeeded to the founders.

Doing so, do I feel Han and Thap endure underserved misfortune?

The best thing for me is to follow my friends to the mountains.

The surrounding green mountains are high thousand and thousand steps.

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86 On that stele was clearly carved “more than thirty disciples”. In *Tam To Thuc Luc*, the character (+) meaning “ten” was wrongly written as (F) meaning “thousand.” The names of the disciples are listed on the stele in two groups. Among the names still legible, we find out 38 people.

87 Han is Han Son (Han Shan in Chinese) and Thap is Thap Bae (Shi Bei in Chinese) were two secluded monks under Chinese Tang dynasty.
Despite his succession in the founder’s role, Huyen Quang seemed to be not so eager in edifying the clergy. And only after 4 years, he died in Con Son in 1334. Huyen Quang was a great poet. Among the small number of poems written under the Tran reign and the remaining later, we have more than twenty of them. But we know very little about his thoughts on Buddhism. Most of Huyen Quang’s remaining poems glorified the nature, the flowers… Perhaps Huyen Quang regarded the nature, the universe, the vegetation with his Buddhist heart and spirit, thus we are in difficulty to know his views on Buddhism. We have found one poem about the living beings – the “Ai phu lo” (To pity the prisoner of war) that expressed the monk’s compassion.

I would want to send you a letter written with my blood

The lonely flying swallow rushes into dense clouds.

How many families will be waiting for the moon tonight?

Separated in two places, we both have the same pain.

Huyen Quang’s thoughts on Buddhism were very little manifested in the two last sentences of his poem “the Dien Yuu pagoda.”

“Thousand and thousand causes don’t trouble me any more because of a wall separating me from earthly sorrows and grieves.

When one has nothing to worry about, his eyesight will be broadened.

When we penetrate into the equality of the “right” and “the wrong,” then there is no difference between the Devil and the Buddha, everywhere is the Buddha’s realm and the Devil’s palace will also become the Buddha’s realm!

That “equal” view or that “view in two” were Thai Tongs and Tue Trung’s points of view that we met above. We can say that Huyen Quang was an artist as well as an erudite Buddhist scholar. But he was not a suitable person for the organization and the edification of the Truc Lam clergy. Nevertheless, he was old and the time he assumed the leadership of that clergy was too short.
But the decline of Buddhism since the middle of the fourteenth century was not Huyen Quang’s responsibility. At that time, the circles that had strongly supported Buddhism i.e. the nobles of the Tran dynasty– had progressively lost their political and economic power. The feudalistic regime based upon big property in land, rice fields, farms, fiefs etc. began to break up. The officials having got Confucian studies—and representing the class of lower landlords began to assume important positions in the state apparatus. With its examination system, Confucianism progressively gained strength. Many Confucian scholars such as Truong Han Sieu and Le Quant heightened their voice to criticize Buddhism. As a matter of fact, such a criticism\textsuperscript{88} reflected a reality that was unfortunately reflected in the large number people switching their loyalties away from Buddhism as well as monks leading to derelict pagodas. However, it was only at the end of the fourteenth century in 1396 when Ho Quy Ly gave orders discharging apprentice monks and compelling people under the age of forty to give up their robes that Buddhism was inflicted a decisive and severe blow. It was at this juncture in the history of Vietnam that the brilliant and glorious period of Buddhism came to an end.

\textsuperscript{88} See inscription on the stele at Khai Nganiem pagoda and Linh Te Thap Ky by Truong Han Sieu in Duc. Thuy mountain, and the stele inscription written by Le Quat at Thieu Phuc pagoda, Bai hamlet, Bac giang province