

SOME FEATURES ON TRÚC LÂM ZEN - BUDDHIST SECT IN VIETNAM

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Abstract: *Over the dynasty of Dinh, pre-Le and Ly, Buddhism has confirmed its role in the spiritual life and society of Dai Viet people. The role of Buddhism became increasingly important as Ly Thanh Tong founded Tsao T'ang Zen, a meditation combines elements of Confucianism and Buddhism, to meet the requirements for managing and building ideology of national independence. The Ly Buddhist spirit was continued in the Tran time for the birth of Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen. Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen has much to contribute to the independence of Dai Viet, such as strengthening national unity creates strength to defeat the Mongols, building and consolidating the independence thought of nation; built a new thought having particular identities of Vietnamese Buddhism and there is also the first time for Vietnamese Buddhist have had a unified organization from central to local levels.*

Buddhism has an important role in the spiritual life of Asian inhabitants in general and Vietnamese inhabitants in particular. According to the historical documents, Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam by sea from India. After entering Vietnam, Buddhism combined with popular beliefs so that some great Buddhist centers were established in the early centuries. Among them there was Luy Lâu Buddhist centre (in Thuận Thành district, Bắc Ninh province at present). The role of Buddhism gradually became important in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people. According to researchers, Vietnamese Buddhism had many different sects; for example, Wu-Yun T'ung Zen sect, Vinitaruci Zen sect...⁽¹⁾ and Hjang Jing - Hui was the founder of Vietnamese Zen sect. In every historical stage, Buddhism has had different influences. The Buddhist role was more and more important. In the early stage of fighting against invaders for national independence the role of Buddhism was affirmed clearly in social and spiritual life of people. Under the Đinh and pre-Lê dynasty, Buddhism was thought highly and it had a strong attachment to administrative system of nation "Sangharaja Ngô Chân Lưu was appointed to be

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¹. Nguyễn Lang, *The Short History of Vietnamese Buddhism*, Lá Bối Publishing House, Sài Gòn, 1971 and Institute of Philosophy, *The History of Vietnamese Buddhism*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1998.

Khuông Việt Great Monk, Trương Ma Ni was appointed to be Tăng Lục”⁽²⁾. In 987 Song ambassador Lý Giác visited Đại Cồ Việt, king Lê Đại Hành sent monk Pháp Thuận to meet Lý Giác⁽³⁾. Buddhism; however, was mistreated in some periods. It was the case that king Lê Long Đĩnh whittled sugar cane on the head of monk Quách Ngang and laughed when monk Quách Ngang was painful”⁽⁴⁾.

When Lý Công Uẩn came to the throne, Vietnamese Buddhism was developed. In 1010 Lý Công Uẩn allowed people to become monks. In this period many pagodas were established; casting of bells and statues was annual work. In 1016 some thousands of people became monks. Monk Vạn Hạnh was appointed to be the Teacher of Prince. Buddhism occupied an important position in the social and spiritual life of Vietnamese people. From the religion of the masses Buddhism became the religion of nation after the rise of fall of its history. The Lý dynasty Buddhism developed prosperously and king Lý Thái Tông was the 7th disciple of Wu-Yung T’ung Zen sect. At that time Tsao T’ang sect was born. In 1069 king Lý Thánh Tông attacked Champa and Chinese monk was arrested. Chinese monk’s name was Thảo Đường. King Lý Thánh Tông admired Buddhism and he was good at Buddhist dogmas. He led Thảo Đường to Khai Quốc pagoda, and then appointed him to be the Teacher of Princess. Monk Thảo Đường and king Lý Thánh Tông established Tsao T’ang sect. King Lý Thánh Tông was the first disciple of Tsao-T’ang sect. He was the first king to establish Royal Buddhist sect. Tsao T’ang sect continued through 5 generations, and among disciples of this sect were two kings (Lý Anh Tông belonged to the third generation and Lý Cao Tông belonged to the 5th generation) and many high-ranking mandarins as Ngô Ích, Đỗ Anh Vũ, etc. The penultimate king of the Lý dynasty, Lý Huệ Tông, also followed Buddhism. “The Winter of 1224 king became monk of Chân Giao pagoda in Royal palace”. He burnt himself to death at the end of his life. His bones were in Bảo Quang pagoda as a Buddhist.

It is said that Lý Thái Tổ’s ascension to the throne was partly due to the support of Buddhist circles and Buddhism the last hide-out of this dynasty. Tsao T’ang sect was the first royal Buddhist sect in royal dynasties in Vietnam. This sect did not affect the social and spiritual life of all people deeply but it only influenced mandarins and

². *The Complete History of Đại Việt*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Volume 1, pp. 212- 224.

³. *The Complete History of Đại Việt*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Volume 1, pp. 212- 224.

⁴. *The Complete History of Đại Việt*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Volume 1, pp. 212- 224.

royal families. According to statistics, Tsao T'ang sect had 20 famous Buddhist monks of the Lý dynasty ⁽⁵⁾. The Lý dynasty Buddhism was continued to improve in the Trần dynasty and Trúc Lâm Zen sect was established in the Trần dynasty.

THE ORIGIN OF TRÚC LÂM ZEN SECT

The name Trúc Lâm Zen sect originated from the name of the first founder. After leading two wars of resistance against Mongols Empire, nation was brought back into unity, Trần Nhân Tông ceded the throne to his son, then he became a Buddhist monk. "Father's king led a religious life in Yên Tử mountain, his callword was Trúc Lâm đại sĩ" ⁽⁶⁾. According to the researchers the founder of Yên Tử sect was Zen master Hiện Quang - disciple of Zen master Thường Chiếu in Lục Tổ pagoda (Bắc Ninh). Zen master Thường Chiếu was the 12th generation of Wu-Yun T'ung Zen sect and Zen master Hiện Quang was the 14th generation of Wu-Yun T'ung Zen sect (?-1221). Zen master Hiện Quang was Thăng Long inhabitant; he left his family to become a monk when he was 11 years old, and he was good at Three Religions. After traveling everywhere he lived in Yên Tử mountain⁽⁷⁾. He was the founder of Yên Tử sect. His prestige spread everywhere, so king Lý Huệ Tông invited him to come to imperial city many times; he would still refuse. Zen master Tịnh Lữ with pseudonym Phù Vân took over Zen master Hiện Quang. King Trần Thái Tông called Zen master Tịnh Lữ as *Trúc Lâm Đại sa môn* and appointed to be the Teacher of Princess. After entering religion Trần Nhân Tông called himself *Trúc Lâm đại sĩ*, so this sect was called Trúc Lâm. Its center was in Yên Tử mountain. This sect was sponsored by the court and its influence gradually pervaded everywhere.

THE DEVELOPING OF TRÚC LÂM ZEN SECT

The Trần dynasty was descended from fishing people ⁽⁸⁾ in Tức Mặc, Thiên Trường district. After many historical changes, the Trần gradually held the power of nation and replaced the Lý dynasty in 1225. The Trần dynasty thought that "we are descended from lower social class", so kings of the Trần dynasty leaned on Buddhism in order to seize and control the national power. Yên Tử was the Buddhist base of the Trần dynasty. The first king of the Trần dynasty was Trần Thái Tông to

⁵. Nguyễn Hào Hùng, *Overview of Buddhist Philosophy in Vietnam*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Volume 1, p. 104.

⁶. *The Complete History of Đại Việt*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Volume 2, p. 92.

⁷. *Thiền Uyển tập anh*, Literature Publishing House, Hanoi, 1990.

⁸. *The Complete History of Đại Việt*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Volume 2, p. 16.

have many connections with Yên Tử sect. In 1237 royal family had a contradiction, Thái Tông “at night left imperial city to go to The Teacher of Princess Phù Vân in Yên Tử mountain, then he lived there”. Although Trần Thái Tông did not carry out his dream, his leaving was considered the first entering religion. Thanks to concern of the court Yên Tử sect more and more developed. In the Trần Nhân Tông reign (Trần Thái Tông’s grandson) Yên Tử became the Buddhist centre, Trúc Lâm Zen sect-a national Buddhist sect was born in Yên Tử; its first patriarch was king Trần Nhân Tông. King Trần Nhân Tông came to the throne in 1278 and he cede the throne to his son in 1293. “He governed for 14 years, he ceded the throne for 5 years and entered religion for 8 years. He deceased in Ngọa Vân small pagoda in Yên Tử mountain when he was 51 years old” ⁽⁹⁾. Trần Nhân Tông entered religion in 1299 and he deceased in 1308. Before entering religion he had close relationship with Yên Tử Zen sect. In 1295 he left Vũ Lâm to come to Yên Tử. In August of 1299 he built Ngự Dược small pagoda in Yên Tử mountain “King’s father left Thiên Trường palace to enter religion in Yên Tử mountain and became an ascetic”. He became the sixth patriarch of Yên Tử Zen sect and the first patriarch of Trúc Lâm Zen sect. Thanks to the reputation of *Trúc Lâm đại sĩ* and sponsor of the court Trúc Lâm Zen sect became the Buddhist centre of the Trần dynasty. Yên Tử became the centre of Trúc Lâm Zen sect and Trần Nhân Tông was the head of this sect. According to many documents we know that Trúc Lâm Zen sect had three patriarchs: Trần Nhân Tông, Pháp Loa, and Huyền Quang. After the third patriarch, Huyền Quang, died in 1334 the influence of Trúc Lâm Zen sect was gradually declined. In the 14th century Zen master Chân Nguyên restored gradually Trúc Lâm Zen sect and it has been maintained until today.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF TRÚC LÂM ZEN SECT

In the process of existing and developing, Trúc Lâm Zen sect has many contributions to national culture. First of all, Trúc Lâm Zen sect was Buddhist sect of royalty; it was reason why this sect developed strongly. Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam early and it had many different sects. These sects had different ideologies. Vinitaruci Zen sect had Buddhist aspects of India; Wu-Yun T’ung Zen sect had cultural aspects of China. The ideology of these two sects did not meet the need of building and developing the country in independent and possessed period. To

⁹. *The Complete History of Đại Việt*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Volume 2, p. 44.

meet the country' needs on ruling and building the independent ideology, kings of the Lý dynasty founded new Zen sect - Tsao T'ang sect. This sect combined elements of Confucianism and Buddhism. Kings of the Lý dynasty not only encouraged study but also used Confucianism for ruling our country (in 1070 Literature Temple where dedicated Confucius was built and crown princess learnt here). Kings of the Lý dynasty also thought highly Buddhism so some monks were appointed to hold the main positions of the court. In 1088 monk Khô Đầu was appointed to be the Teacher of Prince. Buddhism fell in line with administration step by step; mandarins were both governmental managers and Buddhist believers so the Lý dynasty had the support of Buddhism.

The Trần dynasty continues and developed independent ideology of nation which was manifested by Trúc Lâm Zen sect. Because king was the founder of Trúc Lâm Zen sect so members of the royal family followed this sect; for example, Hung Ninh Vương Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ, Văn Huệ Vương Trần Quang Triều, princess Tuyên Chân, princess Lê Bảo and so forth. Huyền Quang had been a doctor and a mandarin but he left his house to enter religion, and then he became the third patriarch of Trúc Lâm Zen sect. Many people took part in Trúc Lâm Zen sect. According to estimate there were 30.000 Buddhists in the prosperous period of Trúc Lâm Zen sect. The pervasion of Trúc Lâm Zen sect was so great that Lê Bá Quát wrote that "From the princes and high ranking mandarins down to ordinary people, if they give alms and contributions to Buddhist work, they are not at all stingy, even if they use up all their money and property... wherever there are people there are sure to be Buddhist pagodas...". Nguyễn Dữ remarked about Đông Triều that "pagodas were built everywhere people who shaved their heads to enter the monkhood equaled half the entire population..."

Trúc Lâm Zen sect was the Buddhist sect of royalty; it was sponsored by government so it had many pagodas. According to statistics, in the Trần dynasty there were about 9.500 pagodas ⁽¹⁰⁾. Trúc Lâm Zen sect had Quỳnh Lâm - Côn Sơn pagoda (Hải Dương province), Vĩnh Nghiêm pagoda (Bắc Giang province), Báo Ân pagoda (Bắc Ninh province) and hundred pagodas on the route between Hanoi and Yên Tử. According to the historical documents, Pháp Loa, the second patriarch of Trúc Lâm Zen sect built 200 pagodas and cast 1.300 bronze statues of Buddha.

¹⁰. Nguyễn Lang, *Việt Nam Phật giáo sử luận*, ibid. p. 453.

Quỳnh Lâm pagoda had 1.000 hectares of rice fields and 1.000 farmer laborers. Siêu Loại and Báo Ân pagodas had similar condition. The cultivated lands of pagodas were granted by the Trần dynasty⁽¹¹⁾. Trúc Lâm Zen sect had many talented persons and it was strong base for the developing of the Trần dynasty. Trúc Lâm Zen sect became the Buddhist sect of nation. Its organization was close from centre to locales. The material facilities and dogmas of Trúc Lâm Zen sect were worked out. With the development of Buddhism, Confucianism was also thought highly by the Trần dynasty. The entrance examinations of talent persons were carried out annually to supply talent persons to the country. Both Confucianism and Buddhism were under the control of royal reign. Royal reign would reconcile Confucianism and Buddhism to create two basic powers to nation: administrative management and ideological one.

The sponsor of royalty helped Buddhist Zen sect to develop but this sponsor caused Buddhist Zen sect to decline. Trúc Lâm Zen sect developed strongly, pagodas were built everywhere, the numbers of Buddhist monk, nuns and believers increased so Congregation could not control this sect. After Huyền Quang, the third patriarch of Trúc Lâm Zen sect, died in 1390, Trúc Lâm Zen sect was gradually declined. When royalty did not sponsor Trúc Lâm Zen sect longer, its role was dimmed. In 1369 Trần Thuận Tông “issues an edict to compel all monks under 50 years old to return the secular life”. In 1399 “Quý Ly compelled king to follow Taoism and live in Ngọc Thanh temple in Đạm Thủy village (Đông Triều)”. Hồ Quý Ly considered himself Thái Thượng Nguyên Quân Hoàng Đế and usurped the throne in 1400. The Trần dynasty was over, the role of Trúc Lâm Zen sect was also dimmed.

The Trần dynasty existed in 174 years (1226-1400). The first king of the Trần dynasty, Trần Thái Tông, was devout Buddhist believer but the last king, Trần Thuận Tông, was Taoist believer. King Trần Nhân Tông was the founder of Trúc Lâm Zen sect. As from 1299 when Trần Nhân Tông entered religion to found Trúc Lâm Zen sect in to 1400 when the Trần dynasty was declined, Trúc Lâm Zen sect had been in one century. At that time Đại Việt seemed to be peaceful. Trúc Lâm Zen sect connected with the rise and fall of the Trần dynasty. Trúc Lâm Zen sect was established after Đại Việt defeated the Mongols so the Trần dynasty had enough

¹¹. To refer to Nguyễn Tài Thu, *The History of Vietnamese Buddhism*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1989.

supremacy to found a new Buddhist sect. Actually, the ideology of this sect not only enhanced sense of being master of the country but also defended the right of royal reign. The bases of Trúc Lâm were fields and gardens under the cover of religion. The shortcomings of this economic structure led the reform of Hồ Quý Ly. In the reform of Hồ Quý Ly many aristocrats' fields and gardens were seized and many bases of Trúc Lâm sect were fallen into similar condition. The role of Trần dynasty was dimmed so the influence of Trúc Lâm Zen sect also declined. Although the Trần dynasty collapsed, the ideology of Trúc Lâm Zen sect has existed in the spiritual life of people for ever.

WHAT ARE THE FEATURES OF TRÚC LÂM ZEN SECT?

Trúc Lâm Zen sect inherited and crystallized the spirit of Vietnamese Buddhism including Wu Yung T'ung Zen sect and Yên Tử sect. The royal Buddhist sect inherited many Zen elements of Tsao T'ang sect of the Lý dynasty. Trúc Lâm Zen sect began the combination of government and organized Buddhist sect.

Trúc Lâm Zen sect was founded by king. It was the first time for Vietnamese Buddhism to have an united organization from central government to localities. The material facilities and the number of believers of Trúc Lâm Zen sect were so much that it occupied an important position in the social and spiritual life of Nation.

In the process of existing and developing Trúc Lâm Zen sect built a new ideology having particular identities of Vietnamese Buddhism. This ideology was the combination of social ideologies (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism) with the national spirit. To build and strengthen the independent ideology of nation aimed to build a firm dynasty.

The close combination of governmental management and Buddhism made Buddhism enter the world and reinforced the solidarity of all people to create the national power.

The spirit of independent nation which was built and strengthened by Trúc Lâm Zen sect combined the governmental power to Đại Việt win the Mongols three times in the 13th century. Đại Việt's victory had the great contributions of Trúc Lâm Zen sect.

Because of social changes, the historical role of the Trần dynasty was dimmed and the assistance of royal family was lessening so the influence of Trúc Lâm Zen sect

was on the decrease. Although the Trần dynasty declined, the ideology and the contributions of Trúc Lâm Zen sect continued to exist. In the favorable conditions this sect was restored to former prosperity. In the 17th - 18th century, thanks to the concern of government of Lê - Trịnh reign, many pagodas of Trúc Lâm Zen sect were restored on a large scale as Quỳnh Lâm, Côn Sơn, Báo Ân pagodas. The ideology of Trúc Lâm Zen sect was shone in people in the 18th century and Nguyễn Dữ remarked that “In Đông Triều district, pagodas were built everywhere, people who shaved their heads to enter the monkhood equaled half the entire population... Following men who opened virgin soil up the ideology of Trúc Lâm Zen sect was present in the South and many pagodas were built in Quảng Nam, Bình Định, Lâm Đồng... so we can see that the vitality of Buddhism in general and Trúc Lâm Zen sect in particular lives in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people forever. /.